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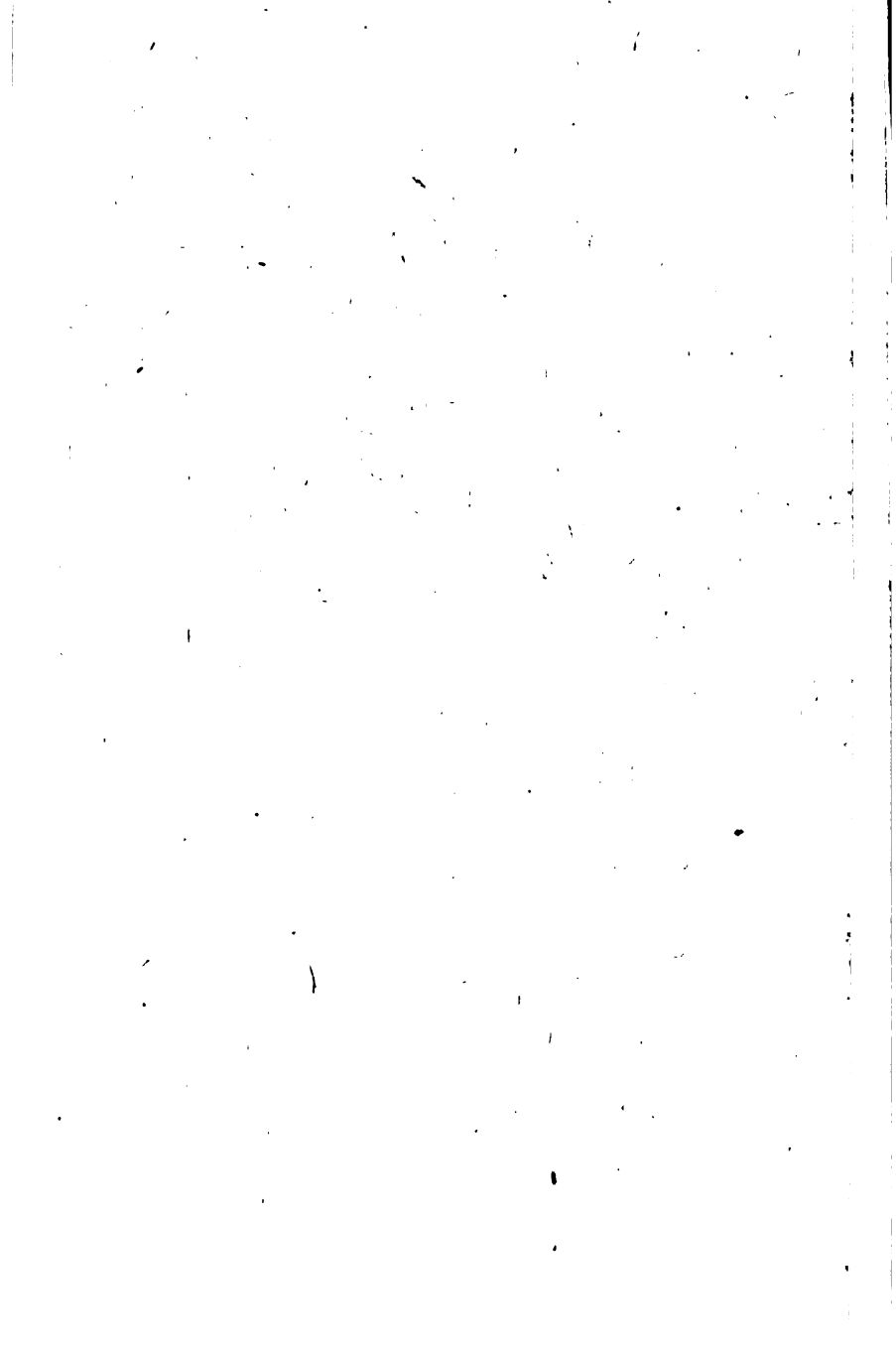
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HOPE

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HEARTS IN EXILE

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

Author of "Barbe of Grand Bayou," "Flowers of
the Dust," etc.

O Exiled Hearts—for you, for you—
Love still can find the way!

Hear the voices of the women on the road!

O Shadowed Lives—for you, for you—
Hope hath not lost her ray!

Hear the laughter of the children on the road!

O Gloomy Night—for you, for you—
Dawn tells of coming day!

Hear the clink of breaking fetters on the road!

O Might sans Right—for you, for you—
The feet of crumbling clay!

Hear the slow, sure tread of Freedom on the road!

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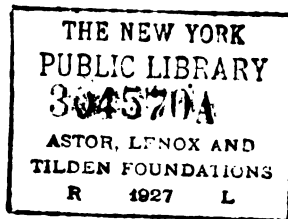
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Published September, 1904

JOHN WOOD
J. WOOD
VIA

TO
EVERY HEART IN EXILE

THIS BOOK OF HOPE

IS INSCRIBED

IN THE SURE AND CERTAIN FAITH
THAT LOVE STILL KNOWS THE WAY

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CHAPTER I

HOW HOPE SACRIFICED HERSELF FOR LOVE OF THE PEOPLE

"YOU think she will be in in a few minutes, Marya?"

"Assuredly. She is past her time now," said the old woman.

"She may have called somewhere," said the young man, and glanced doubtfully at her.

"Sit down, Paul Ivanuitch," she said, in a more than simply hospitable tone, "and I will get you some tea. She cannot be many minutes now."

The old woman nodded knowingly to herself as she went down the passage. The young man sat down for a moment, and then jumped up and began to wander restlessly about the room. How could any man sit still when all his future happiness was in the balance, and when he had good reason to know that the hand that held the scales was no ordinary hand, and might let itself be swayed by no ordinary feelings?

Straight and tall, and spare of figure; deep-set, trustworthy eyes, dark like his hair; frank, thoughtful face, high in the cheek-bones and lean in the cheeks, so that at times one could follow or even anticipate his feelings by the curves and lines that came and went there, Paul Pavlof was distinctly attractive to look upon.

For his was, above all, an invitingly honest face, and one does not come across too many such. Perhaps also there was, in the eager face and strenuous figure, more than a suggestion that such of the good things of life as had come his way had been rather mental than material, had contributed more to his inner well-being than to his outer, that the lower things held but small interest for him, and that he had not greatly missed them.

It was a very plainly furnished room, and Paul Pavlof knew intimately every single thing that was in it. Table, couch, chairs, white-tiled stove, green-shaded student's lamp, all were severely simple and without individuality, but each separate article was glorified in his eyes by the high service to which it was dedicated. He felt like kneeling and kissing the chairs because Hope Arskaïa used them, the floor because she walked on it, the lamp because she read and thought by it, for all these things pertained to the higher life.

He wondered if she had ever thought of him as she sat in the chair or walked the floor.

He knew she had, and moreover that her thoughts of him had been pleasant thoughts. But all the same—

There were neither books nor papers lying about. The lack of them contributed largely to the austerity of the apartment. But books and papers are dangerous things when one never knows at what moment the steps of the gendarmes may be heard on the stair.

On the walls were three portraits. Paul eyed them with reverence, and stopped his wanderings now and again to look at them, as though they might afford him some clue to the answer Hope Ivanovna would give to the question he had come to put to her.

The bearded man with the calm, intent face and thoughtful eyes was her father. He died in the Schlüsselburg casemates, martyred for an idea. High thought and fixity of purpose were the dominant features here, and Pavlof's mouth tightened somewhat as he looked at it. Hope Ivanovna took after her father.

The sweet-faced woman was her mother—the Scotchwoman. She died a few months before him, broken-hearted at the racking injustice of it all.

Hope Ivanovna had her beauty and more, but her spirit was her father's.

The bright, curly-headed boy was her brother. He died before she came into Paul's life for its brightening and embittering.

He was standing before the portraits, finding likenesses in them all to Hope herself, when the door opened again, and Marya, with an apologetic look and shrug, ushered in another visitor—Serge Palma, a strapping, jovial fellow, with blue eyes and light hair, and full beard and moustache; very well dressed, and carrying an air of opulence and hearty good feeling towards himself and the rest of the world; in all respects the very antithesis of the first-comer. He stopped with a short laugh at sight of Pavlof, and Pavlof's forehead crumpled with annoyance at sight of him.

"Hola, Paul! It was not you I came to see," said Palma jovially, in spite of the infelicity of the meeting.

"Nor I you."

"No, I suppose not," said Palma, with another short laugh. "Moreover, unless I'm mistaken, it is no good our both stopping here at the same time. Is it not so?"

Paul regarded him with gloomy annoyance. He was strung to concert pitch himself, and the care-

less gaiety of the other jarred upon him exceedingly. At the moment he hated Serge Palma most cordially, though as a rule they were on friendly terms enough.

"I really don't think you need wait," said Pavlof quietly.

"Of course you don't. But then I do, you see, and that makes all the difference in the world."

"It will make no difference."

"Da! As to that we shall see. But it's no good our waiting together, if you've come, as I imagine you have, to put your fortune to the test."

"I suggest then the propriety of your retiring."

"Of course you do. But, again, I don't see it, my friend. Why should I leave you a clear field? First come may be first served."

"That's as it may be, and since I was first here—"

"Tell you what—let the fates decide it," said the other, with that cheerful laugh of his which made Pavlof grind his teeth. And Palma drew a coin from his pocket, and spun and caught it. "Heads you stop, tails you go."

But Pavlof shook his head with an expression of disgust at such unseemly frivolity in so momentous a matter.

Palma laughed and uncovered the coin on the table. "You win," he said, "so I go. If it had been tails I would have stopped in spite of you, my boy. I shall wait till I see you leave, then I take my turn. I'd wish you luck if I had no conscience. As it is—"

He nodded and went out, just as old Marya brought in the samovar and teacups.

"Nu!" said she, with a wag of the head. "That's right. I'm glad he's gone—if he does not meet her on the road."

"You don't like Serge Palma, Masha?" said the young man hopefully.

"Not in that way, no," with another thoughtful shake of the head.

"He is rich, good-looking, good-tempered—"

"No doubt, no doubt. But there are better things even than those."

Then the door opened and Hope Arskaïa came in, and, to both Masha and Pavlof, the homely casket glowed suddenly radiant with the brightness of its treasure.

"Ah, Paul, mon ami! You have come to share a cup of tea with two lonely old maids. That is good of you. Is it all ready, Matushka? I am later than usual."

From the sweet, full tones of her voice to the

light, firm tread that bore her so rapidly and so gracefully, she was the embodiment of health and energy, and her beauty was very remarkable. But, after the first glow of satisfaction which fineness and regularity and proportion of feature never fail to produce, it was the purposeful soul shining through the eagerness of the beautiful face, and especially through the great dark-blue eyes, which gave her the mastery.

It was the knowledge—the partial knowledge—of what was in her that made Paul Pavlof's hand tremble as he took the cup of tea she handed him. For a woman animated by feelings so mighty as those which moved and restrained Hope Arskaïa was capable of anything.

The one thing that troubled him was the doubt whether she was capable of condescending to so small a thing as the love of Paul Pavlof—to him the mightiest thing on earth.

Her greeting was full of hearty fellowship, nevertheless the first quick glance she had given him had in it something of apprehension. She knew what he had come for, and she feared the result of the interview—for him—and—well, yes, for herself as well. For they had been good comrades for many years, and friendship which aspires to more does not readily content itself with less.

"Any callers, Masha?" she asked, as she drank her tea.

"Is not this one enough, Hope Ivanovna?" said the old woman diplomatically, with a friendly nod at Pavlof, and hastened out of the way of further questioning.

"Masha bullies me," said Hope, with a smile.

"She is a good old soul. You would have been very lonely without her. . . . Sometime she will die, and then, Hope Ivanovna, you will be more lonely still, unless—unless you have some one to take care of you. I have come to-day to ask you to let me be that one. My heart has been yours to trample on since the first time I looked into your eyes. You have known it."

Yes, she had known it, she had known it only too well. And she had looked with foreboding to this moment, for many a day, as the possible end to their friendship.

Under other skies, under other circumstances, it might have been different. But as things were—the ordinary joys of wifhood, home, motherhood, were not for Hope Arskaïa. Rightly or wrongly, her heart was set on other things, and for those other things she was prepared to sacrifice all that woman-kind holds most dear. Compared with those other things she held herself of very small account.

That was the view he had feared she would take. Nay, he knew instantly, even as he spoke, that he had known it all along, and he knew her too well to hope to move her by any passionate pleading.

Her response would have been instant, if response had been possible. One glance from the great dark eyes would have carried his soul up into heaven.

But the eloquent eyes, which would have told him so much, remained downcast, and he saw only the shadow of the long lashes on the white cheek. He rose instantly.

"Forgive me, Hope," he said, as quietly as though his life's hopes had not in the space of a moment crumbled into a heap of burnt-out ashes.

"Paul!" she said, and raised a detaining hand, and there was that in her tone—something of pleading and of pity both for herself and for him—which made him glance quickly at her from under his pinched brows.

He stood silently in front of her and waited—so near to heaven, nearer than he knew, yet separated from it by the deep gulf of a woman's invincible determination, and that woman to other women as a volcano to a candle.

"My friend," she said at last, and her voice was full and strong again, "you know to what my life

is dedicated." She did not look at him, but at the portraits on the wall. "To that end I am prepared to sacrifice myself, body and soul, and these other things are not for me. You are poor, I am poor. Poverty ties our hands. With all your help I could do little of all that cries aloud to be done. Yet I want your help. Will you work with me still for the people, Paul Ivanuitch—in spite of this—in spite of—of all?"

"I would lay down my life for you, Hope Ivanovna. You know it."

"I know it. I know it. Even though I—"

"Even though you marry Serge Palma's millions, Hope Ivanovna."

He could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"Ah!"

"He was here. He will be back presently. God help us all. Why does He permit these things to be?"

"If the sacrifice of one can help the many, it is right to make it, Paul. Palma's millions may help to break the fetters of a nation. What am I that I should withhold myself?"

"You are the sacrifice," he said sadly, and bent and kissed her hand, and went quietly out.

Hope sat silently gazing at the portraits on the wall—past them, at what she had put from her—

past that, at what lay before her. And her eyes were sad in spite of the spirit that was in her—nay, because of it. For she knew, as well as any, where that path would probably lead her.

Old Masha came in presently, and eyed her anxiously as she announced Serge Palma.

Hope's face was grave and composed as his keen glance swept it. There was an afterglow in the great dark eyes which he took to himself, and courage therewith.

"You are welcome, Serge Petrovitch," said Hope.

"Ah!" said Palma, with a humorous twinkle. "Condolences, then, to friend Paul," to which her only answer was a slight lift of the level brows.

"You know what brings me, Hope Ivanovna," he said in reply. "I am no student and have no gift of words. Will you be my wife?"

She looked at him quietly, and then asked, "Are you sure you know what that means, Serge Petrovitch?"

"What it means? To be my wife? I know what it means to me, Hope Ivanovna."

"I must be sure of that. Listen to me. You know that I work among the people."

"Every one knows it," he nodded.

"Since ever I can remember, the thought of the people under the yoke has weighed upon me, and my heart has groaned with them. My father died in Schlüsselburg, as all the world knows. His only crime was the desire to raise the people out of the slough. My mother went before he did. The same blow killed her. There they are on the wall, and night and day they cry to me to help the work on."

"It is a good work."

"And a dangerous, and heart-breaking in its slowness, for lack of workers and for lack of funds. If you are ready to join me in the work I will be your wife."

"I will join you, Hope Ivanovna, so long as you don't go to extremes. I am no believer in force as a remedy."

"Nor I; brains and money properly applied will bring the remedy in time. It may be slow, but it will come. It must come. It shall come," she said vehemently; and added, with quiet conviction, "we want to build up, not to overthrow; to plant, not to uproot."

"I am with you there with all my heart. We will work side by side in the matter."

And doubtless in the glow of his passion he meant it.

He had been prepared for some such demand. He had considered it. He was ready to accede to it sooner than lose her. Doubtless, also, somewhere in his mind there was the feeling that altruistic notions such as these were common to most women gifted with intelligence above the ordinary. And if one's heart were set upon such an one, why, you had to take the rough with the smooth, the thorn with the rose. It was a phase which time would overlay. The inducements of a safe, luxurious life would wean her from it by degrees, and there would be no harm done.

But that only showed how very little he actually knew of the woman he had asked to be his wife.

Her father was that Dr. Ivan Arskoi, whose only crime was his far-sighted love for his fellows, and for the best interests of his country. To Autocracy and Bureaucracy, however, such a man represented social revolution. And so he did—but revolution by natural growth, not by fire and steel; evolution, therefore, though the results to the bureaucrats would be the same in the end. And, since those results must necessarily be extremely unpleasant, the bureaucrats promptly nipped Ivan Arskoi in the bud. He was labelled "untrustworthy." Administrative process carried him off one night to the Schlusselfurg. For two years he lay there without

trial, and there he died. His wife's heart broke against the bars, and Hope, a girl student of sixteen, was left alone in the world, except for an aunt who took charge of her, and old Marya Ostronaya, her nurse.

Hope continued her studies and nourished the faith and hopes of her father. When the guardian aunt died, leaving her a tiny patrimony, she eked out her living by teaching, and devoted every spare minute of her life, and every rouble that could be saved from the slender housekeeping, to that quiet propaganda among the down-trodden for which her father had already given his life.

Paul Pavlof she had long known in the schools. She had also been on terms of closest friendship with his mother, Elizabeth Pavlovna, one of those sweet, saintly souls which every land and every creed produces, and Paul, in his high-mindedness and abstraction from the lower things, was very like her, as he was like her in the face and eyes. His aim in life and Hope's were identical, but he was poorer even than she. His father was a proprietor possessed of no business aptitude. When he died, what remained after the Jews were satisfied was just about sufficient to keep Paul's soul and body together during his University career, and no more.

He was a quiet, thoughtful fellow, student still, and teacher in his spare moments of those same wakening ideas which animated Hope Arskaïa.

Their common interests and common dangers—for it is dangerous in Russia to think of things as they ought to be, and still more dangerous to speak of them—these things had drawn them very close together. So close that Pavlof had even dared to dream of a closer union still.

He had told himself a hundred times that it was only a dream, and yet he would not banish it, for it was the radiance and glory of his life, the dash of colour in the grey, without which a man's life flies low on sombre wings.

Then Serge Palma came upon the scene. He was the only son of Peter Palma, of Odessa—Prince Peter, by descent from a former petty ruling family, just as Paul Pavlof, if he had chosen, could have claimed a similar title, but wisely forbore. Prince Peter, however, finding, like Pavlof's father, that his rentals were decreasing year by year, had gone into the grain business and had amassed a fortune in it. He died, and his son Serge was enjoying the fruits of his labours, scattering what he had not gathered, dispensing with free hand that which had cost him nothing to procure.

He met Hope Arskaïa first at the house of Kataya Barenina, whose brother Mikhail was one of his many friends. The girl's remarkable combination of beauty and high intelligence and intense earnestness had made a great impression on him. With wide-open eyes to possible consequences—for Peter Palma's son was no fool—he pursued the acquaintance to its ultimate issue, and now he had asked her to share his life, and she, for sake of what she held more highly than any earthly happiness, had consented—on condition that he also shared hers.

CHAPTER II

HOW ONE WENT FORTH ALONE

SO, in due course, Hope Arskaïa became Hope Palma, and no littleness of mind imputes to Paul Pavlof from the fact that, when he got the offer of a small medical appointment in Moscow, he accepted it instantly, and Odessa knew him no more. He was very human, and he loved Hope Arskaïa to the very depths of his aching heart. Consideration for his own peace of mind might not have carried him to this final extremity of exile. He might, indeed, have found a gloomy satisfaction, something not very far removed from a flagellant pleasure, in watching her from afar, meeting her occasionally, and nursing in secret the thought that her heart had surely been his before she consummated her great self-sacrifice to duty by becoming Palma's wife.

But he was too big a man for that. If Hope could sacrifice herself for her life's work, so he could sacrifice himself for love of her.

It would indeed have been a sore trial to any

man to watch from the outer darkness the happiness which, under equal circumstances, might have been his.

If he had seen any possibility of service to Hope he would have suffered and rejoiced. But there was no visible call for sympathy on Hope's account after her marriage with Palma. She seemed quite contented, nay, even happy, and Pavlof, pondering this strange matter in the light of a deeper understanding of her than most, imputed to her neither lightness nor forgetfulness.

He had known her better than any, and he knew that, compared with the work which she looked upon as an inheritance of sacred obligation from her father, her own well-being, prosperity, happiness, were as nothing and less than nothing.

To some it may seem that altruism so complete as this is visionary and overdrawn. The history of the evolutionary movement in Russia has given us many examples. Not that I would, for one moment, be supposed to hint that Russia monopolises, or even possesses in higher degree than other countries, this mighty force of self-sacrifice. But, in happier lands, the self-sacrificing dree their weirds below the level surface of life, obscure and unknown; whereas, in Russia, their lives and sufferings and deaths are, by force of circumstances,

flashed luridly on the screen and set the startled world aghast at times.

He saw that she was contented to her new life. His presence in Odessa could afford her no pleasure, might even cause her a twinge of regret at times, for, with all the will in the world, a quiet face was all he could compass, and cheerfulness was hardly to be expected of him.

So he called upon her once after her marriage, to say farewell, and then he went away to Moscow.

He might have denied himself even this visit, and he debated the matter within himself for some time before deciding on it. Then it seemed to him that Hope might reasonably feel hurt by such avoidance, and by such a lapse from the ordinary rules of courtesy, and he went.

Old Masha had followed her mistress into the new life. She received him with all the old friendly favour which would have put him in Palma's place if the turning of the wheel had rested with her.

"I will tell her you are here, Paul Ivanuitch," said Masha, scanning his face, woman-like, for sign of his feeling, but lingering still.

"I am going away to Moscow, Marya. I have come to say goodbye."

"Ach!" said old Masha knowingly, and stood looking at him.

"Tell me, Marya. Is she happy?"

"Yes, she is happy, Paul Ivanuitch," and added quickly, "but you know she is not like others. It is not of herself she thinks. It is a terrible great change," she said, waving her simple old hands at the sumptuous appointments of the room. "I am almost afraid to speak aloud at times, it is all so fine. But it doesn't trouble her one bit, and it is not that she cares for. It seems to me sometimes that we have half the poor people of the city on our hands, and there are fresh ones every day."

"And Palma is good to—to you, Marya?" he asked, with an almost imperceptible quiver of the lip, which old Marya did not fail to catch, though her eyes were not as strong as they were once. She knew so well all that lay behind it.

"He is very good, Paul Ivanuitch. He is a bigger man than I thought. He is very generous. My God! how the money goes! I am afraid in the night sometimes that it will come to an end, but there is always plenty next day. I did not know any one had so much money."

"I will send you my address in Moscow, Marya. If ever I can do anything for—for you—or for her, will you promise to let me know?"

"Surely. It is good to know one has a friend to

turn to. Now sit down and I will tell her you are here."

He did not sit down, but stood looking at the big oil paintings on the wall—Prince Peter, and Serge's mother, and Serge himself when he was a small boy. And the rich hangings to the windows and doors, and the carved table and buffet and chairs, stole in upon his senses without his knowingly looking at them, though he remembered them all afterwards, because they were the things she lived among. And then the door opened, and he was face to face with Hope herself.

She was looking very well, very bright and cheerful, more richly dressed than he had ever seen her, more beautiful than ever.

His face was thinner even than it used to be, and his deep eyes deeper, and keener, and more ardent, she thought, but just the same straight, honest eyes that always met your own frankly and squarely, and held no equivocations. Perhaps there was something of a shadow in them now, but it might be only that they looked deeper in their settings than before. In truth there was in them the shadow of a slight reserve to which she had not been accustomed. For in spite of himself he felt a touch of resentment at her cheerfulness, and a touch of anger with himself for so feeling.

"You are going away, Paul Ivanuitch?" said Hope, when she had greeted him.

"I am going to Moscow, Hope Ivanovna. I have got an appointment there. It is not much, but it may lead to more."

"You will be missed here. Will you still be able to carry on the work there?"

"Oh, surely. I hope to have still larger opportunities. My work will lie among the very poor, and there is never any lack of them."

"It would grieve me to think of you dropping it."

"I will carry it on as you would have it, Hope Ivanovna, as long as I am able. When you have set it in one's heart it would be as hard to drop it as it would be to forget yourself."

"There is so much to be done and so few to do it," she said earnestly.

"You are always busy?"

"Always busy."

"And quite happy?"

"Quite happy. I have no time for anything else."

"I am glad," he said quietly. "If ever I can serve you in any smallest thing, I beg of you to let me know."

"There is no one I would sooner turn to for

help, Paul, if that time should eve. come. I wish—”

She looked wistfully at him, and he knew that she was wishing it was in her power to do something to brighten his own path in life. But the only thing she could have done she had not seen well to do, and nothing else was possible.

“God be with you, Hope Ivanovna, and give you every good.” He stooped and kissed her hand, and she bent and kissed his forehead.

“Would you not stop and see Serge—”

“No, I thank you, Hope Ivanovna. I leave to-night, and I still have some calls to make,” and he was gone.

She told Palma of his visit, when he came in, and he, in his hearty way, regretted that she had not kept him to dinner.

“It’s ages since we met, and we used to be good friends at one time. Let me see—” and his eyes rested thoughtfully on Hope’s face, as he cast back in his mind—“yes—I don’t think Pavlof and I have met since our marriage. I suppose that was it. I don’t believe Paul Ivanuitch has ever quite forgiven me for carrying off the prize. But really, you know, I was not to blame. Was I, now?”

“No, you were not to blame, Serge, and I’m quite sure Paul Ivanuitch bears no malice. He

will be very lonely in Moscow. I cannot help feeling sorry for him."

"Oh, he'll soon make heaps of friends."

But Hope knew better, and her own great happiness set his lonely way in deeper shadow in her thoughts.

For she was happy. In marrying Serge Palma she had given but small consideration to her own feelings. And Palma, perfectly aware of that, had set himself diligently to win her completely to himself.

He had tried at first, in the quietest and most unobtrusive manner possible, to introduce into her life new elements of interest, which might, he hoped, in time wean her from those labours among the poor and downtrodden which she looked upon as her great work in life.

His manner of life had been, in almost every respect, the very opposite of hers. He had always had more money than he could use. He had always flung it about generously. He had never had to scrimp and save in his life, and self-denial was as absolutely unknown to him as the absence of the necessity for it was unknown to his wife. Whereby no doubt he had missed much, and had been to that extent docked of his full stature.

He treated Hope with the greatest generosity, gave her everything he thought she could possibly want, which included very much which she did not want at all, and in every possible way showed her that the one desire of his heart was to win her completely, and so round their union into a perfect circle of happiness.

In order to win her to his own ways, he found it advisable at times to go hand in hand with her along her chosen paths. And, bit by bit, for very love of her, he found himself going further than ever he had dreamed of going. For very love of her he found himself first tolerating, then enjoying, this new way of life because it was her way. Hers was the finer spirit, and by degrees he came to look through her eyes at matters which had lain under his nose all his life, but which he had never seen until his love for her quickened his understanding.

She was a whole new world to him, a sweet apocalypse, and, by degrees, those things which had sufficed him before came to be as nothing and less than nothing to him.

The change was very gradual, but it could not fail in time to attract the attention of those who sorely missed the jovial dispenser of largesse in Palma's former circles. His old friends chaffed him and laughed at him. He invited them to din-

ner and they fell under the spell of Madame Palma's beauty, to the extent, at all events, of swearing in marvellous language that Serge Palma was a mighty fortunate man. And if they still chaffed him at times, for his dereliction from their primrosy paths, his quiet smile turned all their shafts aside and even lodged them in their own bosoms. Not a man of them but would have done any mortal thing Madame Palma might have asked of him, however contrary to his natural inclination. But Hope had very soon taken their shallow measures, and not one of them did she find worth using in her great work.

For that work, while patently and undeniably of the most harmless description, and with no end or aim beyond the uplifting of the helpless and downtrodden, was still work at which the authorities looked doubtfully, if not actually askance, and it needed for its furtherance large souls who could be at once energetic and cautious and discriminating.

Even in such simple work as this there ran a vein of danger, in the fact that the downtrodden, when they awake to a sense of their condition, and of the causes of it, are liable to fits of fierce resentment; and at times fiery spirits will out and kindle conflagrations the stifling of which entails far-

reaching consequences and suffering. And at such times the innocent are as like to suffer as the guilty—more like, perhaps, since the latter, with their foreknowledge of coming events, can also provide ways of escape.

Palma was redeeming to the full the promise he had made to Hope when he asked her to marry him. In her simple schemes of amelioration he was with her to the extent of her will. Against anything beyond he set his face like a flint, as indeed she did herself.

The people were nominally free, but they were not educated up to freedom. It was her aim, as it had been her father's, to lift them out of the sloughs, so that in due time they should be able to put their unknown powers to noblest uses. But as to any violent and precipitant exhibition of these as yet immatured powers, they never ceased to warn their poor folk with all the strength that was in them; and their poor folk met their warnings with vehement denial of any remotest thought of any such intentions, and talked among themselves afterwards in ways that would have given Serge Palma nightmares in powder magazines if he had dreamt of them.

He regarded some of her agents with considerable doubt, though she had chosen them with the

utmost care and discrimination, and had tried them well before she leaned to any extent upon them.

"Now that fellow Petrof, Hope? Do you feel quite safe with him?" he asked her one day, when Dmitri of that name had come creeping up to beg Hope Ivanovna's assistance for Katerina, wife of Nicholas Korba. Katerina was expecting to be laid up, and her husband had managed to get into the hands of the police.

"I've known him a very long time now, Serge, and I have never found him take a kopeck for himself of what I have given him for other people."

"I wish he'd make more noise when he walks," said Palma, smiling himself at the meagreness of his grounds for disliking Dmitri. "He goes along like a snake, and it's all I can do to keep from putting my foot on him."

"He is very quiet. But, you see, they learnt to be that in the old times, and some of them can't get out of it."

"Well, we can only trust in Providence that they put the money you give them to the uses you intend."

"Where I give money they are mostly in such want that they would grudge it being used for anything else. But you are quite right, Serge. There is a risk, and I don't see how we can elimi-

nate it more than we are doing by exercising every possible care and watchfulness. You assumed a great responsibility when you took over me and my work."

"I have never regretted it, my dear, and never shall, whatever comes or goes. You have opened the eyes of my understanding. In time I do believe you will make a fairly good man of me."

"You are very good to me, and to give up so much for me, Serge. You are a bigger man than I thought."

"With such a teacher, who could fail to grow? I have only one regret in life, and that is that I cannot make you Tzarina and give you a free hand to work your fullest will."

"I wish you could. But the one without the other would be very little use. It is not the Tzar or Tzarina who obstruct, but those below them. And how they will ever be brought round I do not know."

"Well, all I want is that we should so carry on the work that it may not bring us into collision with the powers that be, for in that case the work would suffer check. We also, perhaps."

"Our intentions are good, at all events," she said, thoughtfully, "and for the rest, as you say, we can only trust in Providence."

"Ah, my dear, good intentions, they say, pave the road to—Siberia," he said, with a smile. "But we'll do our best to keep on the right side of that line, at all events."

CHAPTER III

HOW ONE WENT TO THE COUNTRY AND ONE WENT OUT OF IT

TIME came when, in spite of all her zeal for others, Hope Palma found it necessary, or at all events was prevailed upon, to think first of herself. And yet, again, perhaps it was rather a possible other than herself that she considered, when she allowed herself to be persuaded to renounce her work for a time and go away into the country with old Marya to look after her.

She had contracted a touch of the low fever that prevailed in the poorer parts of the town, and found a difficulty in throwing it off. For, so long as she was in town there was neither rest nor respite for her. There was always so much to be done, and no appeal ever reached her without meeting full and prompt response.

So Palma, who had an equal, nay, surely, a double, stake in the matter, put down his foot

gently but firmly, and carried them both away from the strenuous life of the town to the restful quiet of a small estate he had close to Akerman, where the Dniester flows wide and free into the Black Sea. He saw them comfortably settled in the house of his steward, stayed a few days with them, and thenceforward divided his time between Akerman and Odessa.

One day, when he came, he brought with him news which it was useless attempting to withhold from Hope, since the matter was being talked of everywhere and had made itself felt throughout the empire.

Scherbatzky, chief of police at Odessa, had been shot one night as he was driving home from his office, and was dead before they could get him into his house.

The usual sweeping arrests followed, but, wide as the net was cast, the actual perpetrator of the crime remained undiscovered. Whence—rigorous enactments and much undeserved suffering.

When Serge came down with the news, Hope's anxiety on account of her poor folk was painfully excited, and he could do but little to allay it. Some of them were undoubtedly in the net. Whether they would creep through the meshes remained to be seen.

Vehement in her belief in the integrity of her people, Hope was for starting at once for the city, and it was all he could do to stop her. Old Marya sided with him energetically, however, and between them they prevailed upon her to remain quietly where she was, though greatly exercised in her mind, and vicariously suffering much.

Serge brought and sent her all the news that was going. Most of their poor folks were, one by one, in due course, and with extreme reluctance, released, as the police found it impossible, in spite of all their efforts, to bring the matter home to them. A new man reigned in Scherbatzky's place and took his own measures to avoid following in his steps, and matters seemed to quiet down again.

So things went on for a time. Serge came regularly to Akerman, Hope's health was decidedly improving, and her work in the city was not neglected, though Serge had deemed it wise, in the shadow of recent occurrences and present enactments, to confine it strictly to the relief of the needy, of whom, in consequence of the general upsetting, there was no lack.

Then the end came swift and sudden; the end of Hope's quiet resting time; the end of her peace of mind for many a day; well nigh, and but for the mercy of God, an end of Hope herself.

For one day, when they were expecting him, Serge never came, nor any word from him.

All Hope's dormant fears crept out of their hiding-places and flapped about her, a tormenting crew, obscuring all her heaven. As the hours passed and still brought no word from Serge, they finally settled down upon her hopes like a crowd of carrion crows.

It was all old Marya could do from hour to hour to keep her from setting out for the city.

She was still in a somewhat tremulous state of health, and looking forward with no little foreboding to that which lay before her. It was inevitable that her fears should carry her thoughts to the extremest possibilities of ill.

"He is dead, Masha," she said, with tragic finality.

"Nay, dearie, we should surely have heard if that was so," said old Marya. "Maybe some business has kept him just as he was starting."

"He would have sent us word. He is dead, or he would certainly have sent us some word."

"Maybe he's had an accident. Things do happen to folks in the city. One's never safe there. Maybe they've taken him to the hospital," said Job's comforter, who hailed from the provinces.

"I must go and see. We will go at once."

"Nay, not to-day, dearie, or we might pass him on the road. He's maybe coming yet."

"No, he is dead," said Hope gloomily, but old Marya's argument had weight with her, in spite of her own convictions, and she dreadingly allowed herself to be prevailed upon to wait till morning.

Morning brought no relief to their anxieties and they started at once for Odessa—and beyond: started at one black day's notice on a quest that led beyond their wildest imaginings.

When Hope and old Marya, pale and heavy-eyed from their night of sleepless anxiety, reached their home on the cliff overlooking Quarantine Harbour, they found it in possession of the police. As to the why and wherefore of so summary a proceeding, or the whereabouts of the master, no information whatever was vouchsafed them, nor could their utmost endeavours procure any.

Palma had been arrested. That was all they learnt, but it was more than enough.

Hope, forlorn and desolate, but driven to desperate daring by her fears, sought the new chief of police in his office. He flatly refused her any information whatever, and set his face like a flint against the pitiful appeal of hers. She sought light in her sudden overwhelming darkness among her husband's friends and acquaintances. But arrest

under administrative process falls on the ordinary ties of friendship as sharp frost on flowers.

Where even the suspicion of untrustworthiness is sufficient to land a man in Siberia, mere friendship affords but small salvage for the unfortunate who falls beneath the ban. It needs closer ties to stand the strain, and at times even these also fail him, and to all intents and purposes he is dead, yet lacking the rest and relief that death confers.

While strength lasted her, Hope strove blindly with the powers of darkness. She wrote in desperate urgency to Paul Pavlof at Moscow, and got no reply. Then she failed suddenly, and old Marya carried her away, broken in spirit and feeble in body, to her own native village in Old Kher-sonese, and none too soon.

There the old woman and her kin wrestled nobly with death for her, and by God's grace won the fight, she not caring one whit, and as fain to die as to live.

But when the soft head of her baby boy lay at last against her feebly-beating heart, new strength and the desire for life ran through her, and she woke again to all the sadness of living.

CHAPTER IV

HOW ONE FOUND HIMSELF IN HADES

THIS brief record deals with human emotions rather than with a too realistic detail of all the facts which excited them. Yet, since every deliberate act in life is fruit or flower of seedling thought, the planting and growth of these is worthy of observance. It is the sum of the small that makes the large, and a single word may plant the seed which, in its time, blossoms into fragrant action, and alters the courses of lives, and rounds life itself at last into its fullest beauty.

We exercise our privilege, then—more fortunately than those chiefly concerned — and skip twelve dreary months, and pick up the threads once more inside one of the Imperial sheepfolds—the great stockade of the Tomsk convict-forwarding prison, three thousand miles from St. Petersburg, on the banks of muddy Tom.

And if you had happened to be sitting on the ground with your back against one of the wooden

houses inside the great stockade that day, this is what you would have seen, just as Paul Pavlof saw it.

Up above, a blue, rain-washed sky, with a clear sun struggling blessedly to warmth; all round, whichever way you looked, the sharp teeth of the high wooden stockade, set in a savage snarl at the world in general, and biting viciously into the soft blue of the sky; many long, rough log houses with grated windows and heavily padlocked doors; a wooden church with pointed spire; black and white sentry boxes every here and there, each with its Imperial watch-dog in the person of a green-coated Cossack, who leaned stolidly on his bayoneted rifle, and in his dull, uninterested regard of his charges, showed plainly that he considered them of a lower breed even than himself.

The ground was churned into mud with the restless tramping to and fro of droves of shaggy, unkempt prisoners in long grey overcoats and flat grey caps. They walked for the most part in silence—a silence that was fretted with the discordant jingling of leg fetters. The sound of chains in connection with one's fellows produces a natural repulsion in most minds, but Pavlof had grown used to it.

He sat on the dryest spot he had been able to

find, with his back against the rough logs of the house, and watched his companions with interest, almost with enjoyment. To a starving dog even a sour crust is treasure-trove. When one has been hermetically sealed in a stone cell for many months, the generous freedom of the prison enclosure, its wonderful height from mud to sky, the great stretch that lay between its rows of grinning teeth—why, it was resurrection. And contact with humanity and freedom of intercourse are things to be grateful for. For humanity, even in the dregs, debased, dirty, disgusting in its details at times, is still preferable to the automatic machinery in human form which attends to one's more pressing outward needs, but is deaf and blind and dumb to all else, in the sepulchral silence of the stone bags of Schlüsselburg.

A year of close confinement had wrought some changes in Pavlof, though not so great as might have been apparent in a softer-bred man. He was always lean and eager of face, and spare and tall. He looked taller and thinner, and perhaps a trifle leaner of face and more cavernous about the deep-set eyes, and the careless sprawl of his limbs as he sat betokened a certain listlessness even in his novel enjoyment of observation.

He lay watching all that went on around him

with the quiet alertness of one deeply interested in his fellows and rejoicing once more in the exercise of faculties long barred. There was a thoughtful keenness in his scrutiny, as though he were endeavouring to weigh each man in his mind and to classify him according to his past. His aspect was that of the student come suddenly into possession of a library bearing specially on his own chosen study.

Not far from him a group of his fellow-prisoners was intently wasting its meagre substance by means of a couple of dice, which, for want of a box, they shook in their balled hands. One of them had chains on his wrists as well as on his feet. When his turn came the rhythmic jingle of his fetters was like a ghostly chorus to his play. Their stakes were scraps of food and morsels of brick tea.

A cheerful-looking little man pushing a barrow came along and stood near Pavlof to watch the gaming. He was past middle age and very uncouth and shaggy, but his face was the most cheerful Pavlof had yet seen. When he took off his flat cap Pavlof saw that his head was shaved bare on one side, by which he knew that he was a penal colonist, and the odd little fellow took off his cap and ran his hand over his head every few minutes as though he had not yet got used to that style of

hair-cutting. Whenever he moved the barrow, to which he was attached with an iron chain, the wheel squeaked monotonously.

"Ey, ey!" he said, with a knowing shake of the head at Pavlof. "It passes the time, but it's foolishness all the same, for if you lose you starve."

"Yes," nodded Pavlof. The stakes are bigger than they look. Can't you stop that wheel of yours from squeaking so?"

"No, barin, I can't," said the odd little fellow, with an evident desire to be obliging if he could. "I've given it all the fat I can spare, but it squeaks all the same. The dust and the mud have got into its throat, I expect. So now I eat the fat and let it squeak. You get used to it in time. It's rather a pleasant squeak, don't you think?"

"I've not got used to it yet. How far have you brought it?"

"Over fifteen hundred miles, barin. From down Orenburg way," and the little old man sat down on his barrow, quite ready for a chat.

"You must be pretty tired of it by this time."

"Yes, and no, barin. You can get used to anything in time, and I do believe I'd miss it now if they took it away. It's a bit in the way at nights sometimes, when I forget it's there, but I talk to it as we go along and it always says 'Yes! Yes! Yes!'

to everything I say, and that's a change for the better anyway."

"How's that?" asked Pavlof, amused at the old fellow's simple chatter and manner.

"Well, you see, barin, my wife, she used to say 'No! No! No!' to everything I said, and she didn't always stop at that either. No, bless my soul, that she didn't! Now the little barrow never says 'No! No! No!' to me, and it never ups and knocks me down and sits on me."

Here a small girl hugging a little slate-blue cat came up, and leaned on the barrow, and looked up at the little old man and lisped, "Won't you give us a ride, little father?"

"Ey, ey! a ride, little Dushenka? Well, well, get in and I'll give you a ride. How's pussy today?"

"She doesn't like the mud, little father," and she climbed in, and the old fellow trudged away to an accompaniment of cheery squeaks from the barrow, jingling fetters, and jerky prattle from the little maid.

Presently he was back, panting and more cheerful than ever, and the small girl climbed down, still hugging her cat, and said, "Thank you, little father!" and ran off to a gloomy-faced man who stood waiting for her.

"Ey, cy!" said the little old man, as he and Pavlof watched her grip the gloomy one's hand and go off with him. "His wife died two days ago, and that's all he's got left. Best off here those who have no wives."

"But you are married yourself, from what you were saying," said Pavlof.

"I was, barin. The little barrow is my wife now," and he patted the barrow with genuine affection.

"And why did you marry the barrow?"

"Well, it was this way. My wife—my other wife, you understand—she carried on with another man, and one day I hit him—and so I wear the barrow."

"That seems pretty hard lines—just for hitting a man."

"Oh, well, I don't know—you see, he died, barin."

"And your wife?—your other wife, I mean?"

"She is at rest, barin, God be thanked!—and so am I," and he crossed himself devoutly. "We did not get on very well together, you see, because she always would have her own way, and she was bigger than me. Still, she was my wife, and I could not let another man have her. And so—well, she died too. And on the whole I get on better with

the barrow than I did with her. It does what I please and says 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' to all I say, and my wife she used to say 'No! No! No!' and do as she pleased. And besides, I can sit on the barrow. It used to be the other way with my wife."

"And how much farther have you got to take her?"

"Another two thousand miles, barin—all the way to Kara."

"And then? Why, you'll be quite sorry to part with her."

"Oh, we don't part, barin. I keep her as long as I live, they say. I hope she won't get laid up or crippled in any way. I'd never get to like another one as I do this one. Bless my soul! I never thought of that before. Whatever should I do?" and his cheerful little face grew overcast at the bare thought of it.

"You're a very plucky fellow to bear your troubles so lightly," said Pavlof, distinctly cheered by contact with so brave a little soul in so odd a little body and circumstances.

"Oh, I don't know, barin. It's no good grumbling when you can't alter things. Besides, she's useful at times—like this, to sit on. And she carries my pack, and sometimes one of the children, and now and again my neighbour's little dog.

Now my other wife would never have done that, you know. She didn't like dogs or children either."

"What's that about my little dog, Gregory Stepanovitch?" asked a tall, lean man, who had strolled up and stood leaning against the house, watching the players and listening to the old fellow's chatter.

"I'm telling the barin he likes to ride in my barrow at times, Mr. Zubof."

"That he does, and to sleep in it too. I only wish it was big enough to hold us all. I slept on the floor last night because we were so crowded, and it was all wet mud and it got into my bones."

"Ah!" said old Gregory with a chuckle, "I sat on my wife all night, alongside your little dog, Mr. Zubof, and my bones are all right. But all the same you don't rest your legs properly when you can't stretch them out."

"And where are you bound for?" asked Pavlof of the newcomer.

"Only to the provinces, barin."

"And why do you take the dog with you? Is he exiled too?"

"He belonged to my little girl," said the lean man gloomily, as he fondled the dog. "She and her mother would come with me, and they took the fever and died. It was just as well, perhaps, for

the road is very terrible for women and children. And I couldn't leave him behind, you see. Besides—" and he nodded his long melancholy face knowingly.

"Besides what?"

Zubof glanced round to see if the green-coated watch-dog was within hearing, and then said cautiously, "I shall walk away from wherever they send me, one fine day, and Fifi will be company for me in the woods. He's as sharp as a needle, and it's good to have some one sensible to talk to when you're lonely."

"You hope to escape, then?" said Pavlof with interest, since he too was bound for the provinces.

"Of course. Any one can escape from the provinces. It's just as easy as walking. But that doesn't say it's easy to get back home, you understand. That's quite another thing altogether. But I've no one left at home to go back to. When I get away into the woods I shall just stop there."

"And supposing they catch you?" said Pavlof.

"Why, then, of course, we go to Kara with chains on our legs."

"All the same," said old Gregory, who had been listening open-mouthed to all that passed, "you'll starve in the woods when the snow comes on."

"Oh, no, I won't. I've thought of all that."

"Ah, well, one doesn't get out of Kara as easily as that, especially with a squeaky little wife tied to your legs," and he patted the barrow consolingly, as though to intimate that no slight was intended and no umbrage must be taken at what was so evidently a fact.

"Out of Kara? I believe you! That's no easy job, though I've done it more than once," said another, who had stopped alongside to see what was going on.

He was a great burly fellow with leg-irons on. His skin, where it was visible, was brown as parchment. His face was covered with a matted growth. He looked as strong as a cart-horse.

"And let me tell you," he added, "there are some worse places than Kara. Yakutsk, for instance. Gr-r-r!"

"And what is Yakutsk like? Been there?" asked Pavlof.

"Yes, barin. I've been there and nearly stopped there. They call Kara hell, but Yakutsk is a hundred times worse."

"That must be pretty bad," said Pavlof, to draw him on.

"Bad! Well, you see, they're human at Kara, if they are a bit difficult and hard on you. But at Yakutsk they're just simple barbarians—eat raw

and sleep cold. Beasts—just beasts, and not fit to live among. I'm rough and strong, and I can stand a good deal, but I can't stand the Yakuts."

"And why did they send you to Yakutsk?"

"Well, it was this way, barin. It was my first time and I was going to the provinces, and there was a barin in our company, just as it might be yourself, and he was bound for Kara. And—well, he was very keen to get back home again, and he got me to change names with him, so that he went to the provinces and I went to Kara. It turned out that he was a red-hot bad lot. He got back home all right enough, but then he was fool enough to get caught again, and then it all came out, and they found they had two of his name on their hands, so they sent us both to Yakutsk to make sure. We got away all right, though it's not easy, for the devils watch you like cats, and—well, it was bad on the road and he died. No, if ever I'm sent back to Yakutsk, I'll die there sooner than try getting out."

"And why did they send you here, Mr. Zubof?" asked Pavlof, of the lean man with the dog.

"I was a schoolmaster," he said bitterly, "and I taught people how to live and grow, and so they plucked me up by the roots and cast me on to the dunghill, and here I am. I never wronged any man, as far as I know. But they have killed my

wife and child, and now I have nothing left but Fifi here. And we're going to live in the woods and care for nobody. . . . I used to believe in God, but I can't fit Him in with these doings."

"These are man's doings," said Pavlof quietly.

"Devil's, barin," said the man who was like a cart-horse, very emphatically. "The men are underneath and the devils are all on top. As soon as a man gets an office he becomes a devil."

"We're all just rats in a trap," said the school-master, looking slowly round the great stockade, "and sometimes I wish the trap would snap and chew us all up with its big, black teeth."

"It's swallowed many a thousand," said the man who was like a cart-horse, "but it always spits them out again—to Kara, and Nerchinsk, and Yakutsk. And it'll go on swallowing as long as there are any left to swallow. Think not, barin?" at a sign of dissent from Pavlof.

"No, I think not. Sometime the end will come."

"Ah, God! That is too good to hope for," said the man who was like a cart-horse.

CHAPTER V

HOW TWO MET IN HADES

THE great gates of the stockade swung slowly open, and a motley crowd came in from the barges which had brought them from Tiumen, and the older inhabitants gathered in long lines to see them pass, all except the dicers, who remained intent on their game.

But Pavlof lay where he was. The sight of the weary women and children, smelling like wild beasts from close confinement of the barges, was always a saddening one.

The newcomers were drafted off to the already crowded kameras, and the grey-clad droves settled again to their aimless wanderings.

While Pavlof still lay musing over his late studies—the man with the barrow, the man with the dog, the man who was like a cart-horse—one of the newly arrived came out of the log house where he had been to deposit his grey sack containing his belongings, and strolled along past the

spot where Pavlof lay. A big man with fair hair and beard. It was only when he had passed that Pavlof got an impression of him. But the impression was so startling that he jerked out an involuntary "Good God!" and sat up suddenly and remained staring intently after the man. He argued himself out of the impression and leaned back against the wooden house again.

But presently the newcomer came strolling back. Pavlof sat up again in rigid scrutiny. Then their eyes met and Pavlof sprang up and ran to him.

"Palma! Is it possible?" he gasped, with a mighty fear dragging rough hands across his heart-strings.

"What—Pavlof?" and their hands gripped tightly.

"It's good to see the face of a friend even in hell," said Palma, with something of his old heartiness. "All the same, I'm sorry to see you here, Paul Ivanuitch."

"And I you, Serge Petrovitch. And your wife—Hope Ivanovna?" he asked anxiously. "She is not here?"

"No, thank God! She is not here."

"Thank God for that!" said Pavlof earnestly.

"But where she is I do not know, nor whether I have anything to thank God for in her not being

here. It is twelve months since they took me and I have had no word of her since," and his face broke for a moment, and then pinched the tighter.

"Sit down here in the sun and tell me your news," said Pavlof. "Where are you for?"

"Kara—ten years."

"And why?"

"God knows!" said Palma, as he threw himself down on the dry spot where Pavlof had been sitting, and Pavlof dropped alongside. "I don't know, and they don't know, or at all events they haven't told me. I have thought and thought till my brain cracks with thinking, and the nearest I can get to it is that some of the folks we used to help have got mixed up with some of these other matters and so they drag us in. It is what I always feared, but if the work was to be done we had to take the risk. I tell you what, Pavlof," he said, thumping the ground with an angry fist, "I know now what it is that turns men's souls to gall and bitterness and makes devils of them. It is damnable work such as this. I never counselled force. I never did a thing but what I believed for the good of my fellows. But—my God!—if—ever—I—get—free, some one shall pay for all this."

"And all for what?" said Pavlof quietly. "For

teaching men and women to look up instead of down, and that they are no longer slaves."

"Slaves they are and slaves they will remain until they break their bonds for themselves," said Palma hotly. "It will come, Pavlof. It must come. A nation cannot be ground down for ever by the handful on top."

"It will come in time, but the time is long, and the grinding is very bitter," and the silence that fell on them for a space was filled with gloomy thoughts.

"Where have they had you?" asked Pavlof presently.

"Petropavlovsk. And you?"

"Schlusselburg."

There was no need for details. Those two words supplied them to the very last letter. They have meant torture, madness, death, to many a man—and many a woman, too—whose only crime was too advanced thought for their fellows.

"And Hope Ivanovna? How will she fare in your absence, Serge Petrovitch? Even if they have not taken her too?" It was the one thought and fear that had been churning through his brain ever since he had learned that she was not there.

"Ach God! Paul Ivanutch, that is where they hit a man when he is down," said Palma, boiling

over again at thought of it all, and emphasising his points with his fist on the ground. "The thought of her, alone and friendless, comes near to driving me crazy at times. She may be alive. She may be dead. She may be in the gutter. You know how things would go. They would seize everything I had and put in an administrator, and nothing gets through their fingers. And—and—" he stumbled, and looked piteously at Pavlof, his face working with deep emotion, and the bold blue eyes, which had always looked so merrily on the world, swimming now in a mist of bitterness. "Ach!—you cannot understand!" he jerked. "In a few months I was to have been a father, Paul Ivanitch, and I had persuaded her to go to the country to give herself a chance. And here I am"—and the heavy fist smashed into the ground again—"and I do not know whether she is alive, or whether the child is alive. I do not know whether I am still a husband, or whether or not I am a father. God! I know only that I am no longer a man, but am becoming a devil at thought of it all. May his blackest curse blight them all for ever and for ever and for ever!"

And again a bitter silence fell upon them.

"Truly, the grinding is bitter," said Pavlof, at last.

"And we are between the stones. But sometimes—that which is between the stones will catch fire, Paul Ivanuitch, and then the grinders will see hell—as they did in France. God grant I be there to see it too!—and to help! I was becoming a man, and they have turned me back to the beasts. Hope Ivanovna is an angel, and she was making a man of me, and they will grind her to powder, like the rest of us. She would wait and wait, and hope and hope, and strive after news of me and find nothing, and then maybe she would die."

"I do not think she would die, Serge Petrovitch. She is very brave. She is too bold-hearted to be crushed by them. It is wonderful what a woman can stand."

"Ay—but—there are times"—said Palma gloomily.

"Ah—that. For that you must trust in God, Serge Petrovitch—as she would."

"It is true," nodded Palma. "I did not know so great good existed till I came to know her. They are nearer God than we are . . . My God! My God!" he groaned, thinking only of his lost happiness, and forgetful for the moment of Pavlof. "And we were so happy and growing happier every day. And now—" and his fist rose and fell in a miserable abandonment of hope.

It was the first time in twelve dreary months that he had been able to speak to any one of all that had been in his heart. There was a gloomy satisfaction in unloading himself to one who knew and could understand.

"We grew nearer to one another with every day that passed," he went on reminiscently, losing sight, in the opened flow of his own thoughts, of the fact that one man's joy may be, and often is, his neighbour's pain. "She had won me, heart and soul, to her work in spite of myself, Paul Ivanuitch. It was for her work's sake that she married me. She told me so, and I, like a fool, believed that in time I could wean her from it and have her all to myself. But it was all the other way. Since ever we were married I have had no other thought than what would please her most. I had come to see through her eyes. I had come to love the things she loved because she loved them. And now—" and he came to earth again with angry fist.

"And she, Serge Petrovitch?" asked Pavlof quietly, and if Palma had glanced at his face he would have found it white and cold. "She had come to love you also?"

"Surely," said Palma, with conviction. "A man may be mistaken about any other woman's feelings, but never about his wife's, Paul Ivanuitch. Yes,

she had come to love me, and our love was growing day by day."

And the silence that fell on them now was gloomy only on Pavlof's part, for Hope's love evoked a glow in Palma's heart even in the bare recollection.

And presently it came to him that their talk had been wholly of himself and his affairs.

"And you, Paul Ivanuitch, why did they take you?" he asked.

"I was working quietly among the poor, as Hope Ivanovna would have had me"—he could not forbear himself that trifling share in her—"and I had no thought of ill to any man. But they carried me off one night and my place knew me no more."

Palma nodded. "And never said what for or why?"

"Yes. They gave me credit for an intention to place myself in a position of illegality. But no such intention was in me—that is, as I interpret the laws."

"And where are you for?"

"The provinces—five years. Minusinsk I'm assigned to."

Palma nodded. "That is not so bad. Escape from the provinces is not difficult, they say, though

it's none too easy to get back home. I was talking to a man who had been through it, as we came along on the barge. He got home all right, but he could not keep out of it, and now he's going to Kara with chains on his legs."

"Yes, it generally ends that way, I believe. Which is your kazarm?"

"Number eight. It was crammed to suffocation, they say, before we came in, and now there are twenty more of us. The days are bearable, but the nights are simply hell."

"Simply hell. If Dante had slept for a week in a Siberian kamera he'd have had something more to write about."

"And when do we go on? Do you know?"

"I think we were only waiting for you. I saw them selecting a convoy guard this morning."

"The sooner the better."

That night, in his fetid corner under the overloaded sleeping-bench, Paul Pavlof found it more impossible to sleep even than usual.

It was not an easy matter at any time, with over a hundred foul fellow-sleepers above and all around one. The sighs, the coughs, the groans, the stertorous snortings and snorings, the restless movements which travelled spasmodically along the packed sleeping-benches from whatever spot

they started till they stopped on the pachyderm carcass of some heavier sleeper than usual, the quarrels, the cursings, the jingle and clink of fetters, the poisonous, ammoniacal smells of all those foul bodies, the sickening heat, the insects and vermin—truly, to any man accustomed to the simple virtues of cleanliness of body and mind, sleep in such a place was not a matter of easy accomplishment, and Palma's short, descriptive word was amply earned. Yet at times Pavlof had found sleep not impossible.

But that night it was very far beyond him. He lay awake with his eyes wide open, too, in spite of the pungency of the atmosphere which weighed on his eyelids like coins on the eyes of the dead, and set his eyeballs smarting. And, though the mirk and reek, and the heavy darkness, and the thick log walls of the kazarm cut short his bodily vision, the white soul of him looked past these and caught glimpses of visions of another kind, and in the sight of them he smiled. Now, when a convict on the great Siberian road smiles to himself in his kamera of a night, he is half-brother to the saints or joint tenant with a madman, and the madman, I am inclined to think, has the pleasanter time of it.

CHAPTER VI

HOW THE WHITE SEEDS GREW

AS Pavlof had expected, the following day saw them on the road.

Palma and he, as political prisoners, had the right to travel in a bumping téléga. They both gave up their places in favour of less capable travellers—Palma yielding his to an ailing wife who was following her husband into exile, and Pavlof dividing his among some of the bigger children, whose mothers had failed to convince the convoy officer that they were under twelve. Whatever their ages, their small feet soon tired of the road, and they showed their thanks to the tall man with the pleasant lean face—whose eyes still smiled at them even when the day's march was drawing to a close—by shy offerings of the wild flowers they had gathered during their perambulatory spells.

Their road lay up hill and down dale, through fine rolling country—mighty stretches of prairie

land gemmed with flowers, dense forests of birch and poplar with evergreens clustering thick below, and now and again wide fields of corn still green in the ear, and, at long intervals, straggling villages of weather-beaten log houses where the women gave the children food.

The children, indeed, had much the best of it, even when they had to walk all the way and grew very tired before the resting-place was reached. For they carried no burdens, visible or invisible, and, of all that the grown folks carried, the burdens that were not seen were the heaviest.

Even when they were tired the children would break out of the straggling line, and flit to and fro among the flowers, and come back laden with wild roses and bluebells and buttercups and daisies, and prattling with delight in their short-lived treasures in a way that braced weary mothers afresh for the rest of the journey.

For the first day or two both Pavlof and Palma felt even the sixteen or twenty-mile course a long one. The stone bags and casemates of Schlusselfurg and Petropavlovsk do not make for muscularity.

But the fresh air was a tonic. The season had been a rainy one so far, and they were spared the torment of the dust. The full day's rest each third

day gave them time to recover, and before the first week was out they found the day's march within their powers, though the monotony of it soon began to pall.

They walked side by side and spoke much together, and, bit by bit, Pavlof came to know much of Hope's life in Odessa, and satisfied himself that her marriage had made for her happiness.

It was new life to Palma to talk of Hope Ivanovna to one who knew and understood her, and who was never tired of listening. He could talk of her all day long, her sayings and her doings, her goodness and her beauty; and the fragrance of her memory shortened the stages, and softened the asperities of the road and the discomforts of the crowded rest-houses.

And if Paul Pavlof spoke little it was because he thought the more, and because he had no text so good to speak upon. And in the reeking darkness of the kameras where they were herded at night like cattle, he looked past the cramping horrors and discomforts, and smiled—and showed as yet no signs of madness.

The Great Siberian Road is kin to Death of the Equal Foot as a leveller of distinctions. Here men are equals in most respects, even though the politicals receive an extra few farthings a day to live

upon, and have a right to bump their bones to pieces in the springless telégas instead of tramping on their own two feet. Those are matters of small importance, however, in the darkness of the overhanging cloud. To all, the past is equally dead—a closed book; to all, the future is a hopeless blank—a book sealed with many seals, and every seal a sorrow.

In the comparative privacy of the dilapidated rest-house where they lay the second night and all the third day, the burly ex-convict, Ignatz, the man who looked like a cart-horse, came to them and asked if they would join a trade union the prisoners had been forming among themselves, and of which he had been chosen president on account of his unique knowledge of the ropes.

This idea of the "artel" was new to them, and Pavlof especially was interested.

"What is it for?" he asked.

"We club funds, barin, and stand by one another."

"What to do?"

"Everything, barin. We help you to buy food on the road, and if you want tobacco or vodka we can get it for you. Later on we can perhaps get chains loosed for those who wear them, but that's not till we're well into Yeniseisk. And when you

get footsore we hire a teléga and ride in turns. Oh, the artel is very useful, I assure you."

"Well, those things are none of them much good to us. What else?"

"If you care to risk a bolt we can arrange that for you, barin. But I do not advise it. It's dangerous, and only one out of a dozen gets clear as a rule. The rest pay—with their skins."

"And how would you escape from the provinces if you wanted to?"

"That's easy. Settle down and be good and quiet and mild as milk till you're ready. Start in the spring when the cuckoo sings, and walk away through the woods."

"And to get back into Russia?"

"Ah! That's another thing, barin. I struck north myself the first time, till I got among the Ostiaks, but it is rough work. How much shall we say now? If the artel can't help you, you can help the artel, and the weaker folk will fare the better."

"Very well!—for sake of the weaker folk, and if we want your help we will let you know," which was quite satisfactory to the burly president-treasurer, who pocketed their donations and went away smiling like a cart-horse who has just filched a carrot from a neighbour's cart.

"You hope to get away, Paul Ivanuitch?" said Palma, after he was gone.

"I may. It's as well to learn what one can, anyway. The surveillance is very nominal in the provinces from all that I can learn. In fact, they do say that some of the officials wink at evasions, and almost urge you to go."

"How then?"

"They draw the prisoner's allowances all the same, you see, while the prisoner lives as he can in the woods and costs them nothing. They count on the final difficulty of getting across the last fence into the home pasture. I should think his idea of steering far north is probably the best."

"If you get away will you promise me something, Paul Ivanuitch?" said Palma, earnestly.

"Surely! I will do anything I can."

"Will you seek out my wife, and tell her—tell her not to grieve for me? I know just how she will take it. She will be blaming herself for having drawn me into it all. And there is no need. Tell her I rejoice in what we were able to do together, and I regret nothing except that we were parted for a time. Tell her to leave Russia and get to London. There is money waiting for her there—at Rothschilds'. I foresaw what might come and provided for it. Tell her to have a letter

always at the Poste Restante for me, saying where I shall find her. I will come to her as soon as I can—ay, though I have to come red-handed. You don't need to tell her that; simply say that I will come. You will tell her all that, Paul Ivanuitch?"

"I will tell her all that—if I get away, and if I find her, Serge Petrovitch."

"You can escape if you will, Paul Ivanuitch," he said, laying his hand eagerly on Pavlof's arm. "Promise me that you will escape and tell her all this."

"I would do much to be of service to Hope Ivanovna, Serge Petrovitch. I will do what I can."

"Ay!—I remember," said Palma, looking at him thoughtfully. "Well, I can trust you, Paul Ivanuitch. I would trust you with my life."

"You may trust me, Serge Petrovitch. A man has but one life, and he can put it to no higher use than the service of his friends."

And thereafter Palma suffered more cheerfully, in the thought that sooner or later Hope Ivanovna would hear news of him and the assurances of his endless love and devotion.

Perhaps the most visibly cheerful member of all their company was old Gregory of the barrow. In his former estate he was lowest of the low, and

of no account. Here, through the fewness of his wants and the consequent equanimity and cheerfulness of his bearing, he walked head above his fellows, and became a dispenser of largesse.

He persisted in keeping as near to Pavlof and Palma as he could manage it, and wherever he might start in the line, before long the squeak of his barrow and the clink of his chains were heard just behind them.

"Hi! You're in a mighty hurry to get there, Old Squeaky Barrow," some would growl, as he pushed past them.

"All right! All right!" he would chirp, with a face like a winter apple. "I like to be in good company, and these two barins are for me."

His barrow was rarely empty, and its most frequent occupant was the small girl with the slate-blue cat to whom he had given rides in the prison yard at Tomsk. She flatly refused to ride in a *teléga* among strange people. She toddled along holding by her grim-faced father's hand, and clasping her cat with the other arm until she was tired, and then climbed up into Old Gregory's barrow or her father's arms, and prattled away to one or other as merrily as though life were one long picnic, and convicts and prisons were not.

And when "Little Darling," as old Gregory

called her, was walking on her own account, or being carried by her father, the squeaky barrow was still never empty. Now it held some other tired child clasping a bunch of flowers; now the impedimenta of some weary mother. And as to largesse, he was for ever giving away bits of brick tea to the women who had children, and scraps of food to the children themselves.

"It doesn't take much to keep me alive," he chirped, when they wondered at him. "You see, when one hasn't been used to much one doesn't need it. Yes! Yes! Yes! Take it, take it! I don't want it."

Palma, too new a convert to altruism to lose himself entirely in thought of others, and unbuoyed by that which had by this time taken full possession of Pavlof, found the going tedious, and more than once broke out into furious commination of the bureaucrats who sat like a curse on the land. Small annoyances fretted him even among the greater ones. More than once he turned and vented his feelings on old Gregory's squeaky wheel, while the old man gaped on him with open mouth and wondering eyes.

"To the devil with you and your wheel!" growled Palma.

"Ey, ey!" gasped old Gregory.

"Stop that infernal squeaking or keep away, man. It's enough to drive one crazy."

"Ey, ey!" said old Gregory. "I know when I'm in good company, barin!"

"Find it elsewhere, then."

"He's a good old soul, and you'll soon get used to it," said Pavlof. "Let us be thankful we're not pushing barrows ourselves, nor even wearing chains."

One afternoon, the long wavering line, articulated here and there with the dancing gleam of a Cossack bayonet, was straggling through a forest of larches, beneath which thick undergrowths of laurel and rhododendron rose on each side in solid green walls. The ground was very broken, great rocks draped with lichens and moss pushed through here and there and shouldered the road where they would. At no one moment could more than a section of the crawling procession be seen. The day had been hot, the stage a long one, every one was longing wearily for the rest-house.

Pavlof and Palma stumbled along in dogged silence. The only sound beyond the shuffling tread of tired feet and the dull clink of fetters was the shrill cheep-cheep of old Gregory's barrow, and the grind of its wheel on bare patches of rock. Little Dushenka was riding in the barrow, but even

she was silent, and sat nodding her curly head to the jolt of her carriage in unison with the slate-blue cat's, both just sufficiently awake to keep their places and no more.

And whenever old Gregory looked at them he smiled through his weariness and murmured, "Ey, ey! The little wife is enjoying herself." And the little wife said "Yes! Yes! Yes!" and little Dushenka and the slate-blue cat nodded, "Thank you, little father! Thank you!"

And suddenly there was a stir behind, a gasp of amazement from the prisoners, and in a moment pandemonium—hurtling curses from the guards and the quick reports of their Berdans. One foaming Cossack sprang in front of the gaping line and threatened its broken ranks with rifle and bayonet. The rest dashed into the undergrowth, and their rifles rang through the forest aisles as through the vaulted heights of a cathedral.

A dozen of the prisoners had made a bolt for freedom, by prearrangement evidently and undoubtedly by signal, for they had gone as one man. The rest, innocent even of intention, after gazing for a time with open mouths, sat down in the road, glad of the halt, though possibly in cases regretful at its cost.

And presently the Cossacks returned, dragging

their spoils with them—three dead men and four more bleeding from bullet wounds, three bashed almost into pulp with rifle stocks. Whether any had escaped they could not be sure till the roll was called.

The captain of the convoy stormed at his men, and they flung back his curses from the corners of their eyes. The prisoners looked downcastly on the bruised, the broken and the dead, spread before them as an object lesson for future would-be absconders.

Little Dushenka stared with the rest, her blue eyes wide with wonder. And suddenly she scrambled down from the barrow, and ran to one of the bodies, and knelt by it with her cat still in her arms.

"Little father!" she cried, in her fluty treble. "Have the bad men hurt you? Oh, what have they done? Won't you speak to me, little father?" and the little round face bent anxiously over the grim dead one, which yet had been dear to her.

Pavlof went to her where she knelt peering into the dead man's face.

"Stand back there!" stormed the captain, in the middle of his furious harangue to his men.

But there was a stricken little heart in question, and Pavlof paid no heed to him. He drew the

child up into his arms and soothed her with gentle words.

"Dushenka, little Dushenka! Your father has gone to be with your mother."

"Has he, then?—truly?"

"Truly, dear. He has gone home."

"Back to Russia?"

"To a much better place than even Russia."

"Is it possible? Then why did he not take us with him?"

"You will go, too, in God's good time if you are a good girl."

"And Katinka, too?" hugging her little cat close to make it quite clear that it must be both or none.

"We must see how Katinka behaves."

"What are they doing with my papasha?"

"They are putting him into one of the carts. But that is only the outside of him. He himself has gone to your mother."

"Ah—truly?" and the little maid, lost in wonder, settled herself in the arms of the tall man with the deep, kind eyes.

"Give her to me, barin," said old Gregory, as the captain came striding up with menace in his face. "She won't feel so heavy in the barrow. I will be her papasha and take care of her now."

"You are not my papasha, but you shall take

care of us, Gregory Gregorievitch, because you are good and we like your barrow."

"Now, then, which of you were mixed up in this matter?" demanded the captain, of the quivering line.

"You"—to Pavlof. "Whose child is that?"

"Her father lies there," said Pavlof, pointing after the dead man.

"And you knew him?"

"Only through seeing him with the child."

"You had an artel? Of course you had an artel. Who was president?"

Pavlof shook his head. "You know artel rules, Excellency. He who speaks dies."

"I'll artel you all. He who doesn't speak shall—Stay!" and his keen eyes ran rapidly over the crowding faces. "Yes! I remember. You!" pointing a finger like a bayonet at Ignatz, the burly ex-convict. "Step out here! I have seen you busy among them. Are you president?"

"I was, Excellency. But this was quite against my notions. I urged them against it. It was foolishness."

"I'll president you! Knock off all those chains," he cried to his men, "and bring them here. It is right the president should wear the chains of office."

They prized open the fetters of the dead and wounded, and hammered them on to the burly one's arms and legs, forty-five pounds weight in addition to the five he carried of right—or wrong. Then, chuckling at his Solomon-wisdom, the captain set the convoy in motion, with the decuple-burdened Ignatz as leader, and watched his heavy progression with a connoisseur tilt of the head and a smile of malevolent gratification.

And the abjects, quickened and saddened by this clap of sudden death, plodded gloomily behind the creaking carts. For the carts had become elevated to the dignity of biers, and the motley crowd had become even more of a funeral procession than it was before.

CHAPTER VII

HOW THE SEEDS BORE FRUIT AND FLOWER

THE sleeping kameras of the half-way house were quieter than usual that night. So far as absence of noise was concerned it was almost possible to sleep. The gloom of the day's happenings hung heavy on them all. Perhaps the future also cast its shadow.

Ignatz, the chain-bearer, lay on the ground near Pavlof and Palma, and whenever he moved he rattled like an armoury.

The short remainder of the afternoon's march had told on him, strong as he was. They had seen the veins swell out in his neck and forehead till they looked like bursting. And his eyes, when he stumbled into the stockade, were dim and shot with blood; partly, no doubt, with the weight of his burden, for where five-pound fetters are a burden fifty-pound are torture; and more, perhaps, from the injustice of it, for he had spoken truly when he said the rest had gone against his advice.

"Can you stand it, my friend?" asked Pavlof.

"No, barin."

"They will see that and take them off."

"Yes, barin."

"If you can get through to-morrow, the next day is rest day, and then we change convoys, and the new man may not be a devil."

"Yes, barin."

They did what they could to ease his burdened state, fed him, gave him drink, packed his fetters with rags torn from their clothing; but not much was possible to them, and Ignatz lay brooding all night like a spirit in chains.

Next day his torment waxed with the sun. He plodded doggedly on, and Pavlof, from behind, watched the martyrdom keenly, and his trained eye told him that the man could not stand it much longer. It was painful to watch, even at a distance, the sufferer's vain attempts at easement; the chained hands knitted behind the swollen neck; clasped on the crown of his half-shaven head with the dangling chains about his ears; the heavy head thrown back to balance the weight in front; the gradual bowing of the broad shoulders; the blind, stumbling step.

"He can't stand much more of that," said Pavlof. "He'll either break down or break out."

But Ignatz staggered through the heat of the morning journey, and fell flat only when they reached the eating-place.

Pavlof tried to get him to eat, but the blood-shot eyes looked dumbly at him out of the black-flushed face and he only shook his head.

The captain strolled round smoking a cigarette. He came to have a look at his work.

"Well, Mr. President? How goes it now? Stand up when I speak to you!" he ordered, and Ignatz staggered to his feet and stood swaying.

"You won't be quite so forward in forming an artel another time, my man, or if you do you'll keep it in order, eh?"

But Ignatz had nothing to say.

"When you reach the étape to-night you shall shed one chain, and I shall advise the captain of the next convoy to take off one each night till you get back to normal. By that time you will have learned your lesson maybe."

He flicked the ash from his cigarette and turned to go.

Then, instantly, with the spring of a tiger, without a sound save the indrawing of a great breath, and a clank and a dull thud, Ignatz was on him. With his bunched fetters he felled him like an ox, sat on him, and, before the others had found their

wits, was demolishing the captain's last semblance to humanity with smashing blows from twenty-five pounds of rusty iron chain.

It was done in a moment. The captain was probably dead before he reached the ground, for the great knots of chain came down on the back of his head with the force of a sledge-hammer. But Ignatz sat on his body pounding away still as if his own life depended on it.

All who saw had leaped up with cries of horror. It was the sergeant of the convoy who took the only way to end the matter. He snatched a rifle from a gaping Cossack, took careful aim, and fired. Ignatz, in the act of pounding, rolled over on his victim and the episode was closed. The sergeant took charge of the convoy, the bodies were placed in one of the *telégas*, and the procession moved on.

The future is ever the outcome of the past, as every deed is the fruition of thought, conscious or otherwise. These dire happenings brought the travellers face to face, in the most abrupt and uncompromising fashion, with the great elemental facts of life and death; and close behind them, and interwoven with them, were the more complex perceptions of life in death and death in life. Their hearts were bruised and tender, their understand-

ings were quickened to the mighty meanings of things.

They spoke less now, as they tramped side by side, but thought the more, and the thoughts of both were continually of the woman they both loved, and of her desolation in her loneliness.

Pavlof heard his friend murmur her name in his uneasy sleep. Once, as they tramped in silence, Palma broke out in unconscious utterance of his thoughts, "God! if I only knew that all was well with her!" and never knew that he had spoken. And Paul Pavlof, as he heard it, smiled to himself as he smiled of a night in the darkness of the kamera.

There come a day at last when they passed between two great brick pillars, set up one on each side of the road.

"What are these?" asked Palma.

"We were in Tomsk. Now we are in Yeniseisk."

"So!" and they went in silence and knew that the time drew near when they must part—one for the comparative freedom of the provinces, the other for the terrible tramp of two thousand rough miles to Kara, a dreary journey with a drearier ending.

"You will do that which I asked of you, Paul Ivanuitch?" said Palma presently. "You will escape, and seek out my wife, and tell her all that is in my heart for her? . . . My God! My God! what a pitiful wreck I have made of her life, and I had hoped so much for her!"

"I will do what I can, Serge Petrovitch."

And that night, as they lay side by side in the kamera, Pavlof said to him, "Are you sleeping, Serge Petrovitch?"

"I cannot sleep."

"Then draw your coat above your head and put it close to mine. So! Now, listen! To-morrow we reach Achinsk, and there we part company. You made me promise to do something for you, for the sake of Hope Ivanovna. Will you promise now to do something for me?"

"Surely, Paul Ivanuitch! I will do anything you want."

"Swear it!"

"I swear it—if it is anything within my power."

"It is within your power, and you are pledged. Listen! When they call the roll in Achinsk you will answer to my name and I to yours. You will become Paul Pavlof. I shall become Serge Palma."

"Good God, Paul Ivanuitch!—What—?"

"You will go to the provinces in place of me."

"But—"

"You will wait till the cuckoo sings in the spring—"

"But—Paul—"

"And then you will walk away and strike north for the land of the Ostiaks"—he felt Palma's body shaking as with an ague. "You will be very cautious, for Hope Ivanovna's sake. And when you find her you will tell her that Paul Pavlof did his best to live up to her teaching."

"It is your life you are giving for me, Paul Ivanuitch," said Palma hoarsely.

"For you and for Hope Ivanovna. But perhaps not. I shall try east from Kara, if the chance offers."

Palma was silent for a time, the magnitude of the sacrifice struggling within him against the sudden mighty hope that Pavlof's offer had kindled.

"It is too much, Pavlof," he said brokenly, at last.

"You promised."

"Ay, but—this—"

"You must think of your wife—and the child."

"Ah God—the child!" and he strove against it no more.

Nine months later, "Serge Palma," lean and wiry, and worn with the road, but cheerful of face,

and with that in his deep-set eyes which drew men's liking, trudged through the deep spring snows into Kara and found his place among the forlorn and downtrodden.

And in Yeniseisk, "Paul Pavlof," big and bluff, fair-haired and blue-eyed, listened eagerly for the song of the cuckoo, which should tell him it was time to be up and going.

And this great sacrifice and its acceptance were tribute to the love two men bore to one most gracious woman.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW HOPE WRESTLED WITH SATAN AND GOT HER OWN WAY

"IT is well with the child, Marya," said Hope Palma, as she rose from her knees by the bedside and kissed the dead face of her three-months-old baby.

But Marya Ostronaya wept inconsolably.

"Dear heart!—Matushka! It is no good to weep—he is safely home. He will never know prison cell and chains. He was dearer to me than my life, but I thank God he has taken him to himself. And I do not think he suffered, Masha."

"No, he did not suffer. See the smiling face of him," wailed old Marya. "It is the face of an angel from heaven."

"In heaven, Masha, dear, and that is still better. He will have found my father and mother. Ah, how they will welcome him! He is safe. And I am glad."

Her face was thinner than it used to be, chastened to a rarer delicacy by the troubles of the past six months, and the great dark-blue eyes seemed larger by reason of the soft touch of sorrow below them. But the brave true spirit shone through undimmed, seemed even to shine the brighter for the fining and chiselling of its tenement.

Since the day she had, at Serge's earnest persuasion, gone away into the country for the sake of the expected one, troubles had pursued her like a pack of winter wolves. That hasty and, in her condition, recklessly dangerous visit to the city flung her on the rack concerning him. All their efforts after news of Palma beat themselves to pieces against the adamant silence of the authorities, like spray against a rock.

He had been arrested and carried off by the police—simply that, and nothing more. He had disappeared from human ken, as many another had done before him.

His estate was placed in the hands of an official administrator, pending developments, and his wife was left to get along as best she could. And all this at the time when, of all times in her life, a woman needs every help and consideration that outward circumstance may procure for her.

That the little one, when it came, was weakly,

was not to be wondered at. The wonder was that either it or its mother survived so dreadful a time. For three months the tiny life flickered gently in their tender hands, and then went quietly out.

It was with a new and deeper reverence that Hope recalled the memory of her own mother, who had suffered in her time as she was suffering now.

She had her father's intrepid spirit, however. Bend she must before the repeated blows, but break she would not, and as soon as her baby was buried she turned everything she possessed into money, and went up to St. Petersburg to prosecute inquiries after her husband.

Wherever he might be she was determined to follow him, if it were humanly possible to do so. It was for love of her that he had been drawn into the net, and her place was by his side. And, moreover, the motives which had in the first place induced her to join her life to his had grown into a close and true affection. He had loved her very warmly, and his nature had deepened and developed by contact with hers. Her marriage had turned out a success, in spite of the fact that she entered into it more from love of duty than for love of the man she married.

The search after news of him was heart-breaking work, however. Post sent her to Pillar, Pillar to

Post; an endless round of supercilious insolences and cold evasions. Her patient endurance of the harassments of her quest might have worked upon a flint, but the hearts of the bureaucrats were unmoved.

Her beauty, however, wrought for her where her anxious pleading and visible distress failed. The results of all her inquiries focussed at last upon one, Colonel Zazarin, of the Ministry of the Interior, as the man who could help her in her search if he would. Her patient pertinacity in time procured her an interview with him.

Colonel Zazarin was a man of commanding bodily presence, but his face was predatory, his eyes and mouth lairs of low gods. Hope recoiled from him with the instinct of a dove from a hawk, of a lamb from a wolf, of a pure woman from a foul man.

After a second prolonged stare at her face, the Colonel's haughty rigour abated somewhat. He questioned her at length, promised to look the matter up, and told her to return in three days. When she went back he had more questions to put and told her to call again, and again, and yet again.

She knew he was amusing himself with her, and that he could probably have put his hand on the

necessary papers in five minutes at any time, had he chosen to do so. Questions always, endless questions, she might have been a criminal and he the examining magistrate by the number and irrelevancy of his questions, and she found it more and more difficult to retain her equanimity under it all.

Then, to her great annoyance, he took to calling upon her at her apartments, to ask still further questions, and to convey trifling scraps of information which only kept her hungry for more. With all her might she strove to keep her anger down, and to close the eyes and ears of her understanding to the meaning of the Colonel's distasteful attentions.

But it was desperately hard work. It grew beyond her bearing, and at last one day she broke out stormily, "Colonel Zazarin, if you have anything to tell me, tell it me, and let me be gone. If not, pray say so, and I will try elsewhere," and the Colonel gazed at her admiringly.

"Quite so, quite so," he said. "But you are so impetuous"—she had been in St. Petersburg a month, and knew just as much of what she wanted to know most, as on the day she arrived, and of some things much that she would have been glad not to know. "A matter such as this needs time,

my dear young lady, time and much careful inquiry. It would not do to make any mistake. Is it your intention to follow your husband—that is, in case we should find that he has been sent away?"

"Certainly I shall follow him. Where should a wife be but with her husband? Where has he been sent?"

"In certain cases condemnation cancels all obligations of the kind," said the Colonel smoothly.

"What do you mean?"

"Supposing, for example, your husband should have been sent to Siberia, the law sets you free. Your husband has no further claim upon you."

"The law, the law!" she fired. "Your law! I hold myself under something higher. If you will not help me—"

"Well, well! I have not said I would not help you—"

"Where have they sent him?"

"——To the Kara mines," said the Colonel at last.

She had feared it and had been prepared for it. Yet Kara was better than the grave. But then she had never been to Kara.

"I shall follow him."

"Have you money?"

"The law—your law has seized my money," she said bitterly. "I must go as I can."

"Will you permit me to—"

"No, no," and she started up in haste. No woman could mistake what that meant.

"Well, well! But you are so impetuous. If you will go you will have to get a permit to travel with a convoy."

"That I have a right to—even by your law."

"Certainly."

"Then I will avail myself of it. To whom shall I apply?"

"I will see to it for you, if you will not permit me to—"

"Where can I get it? How soon can I start?"

"I will find out. Perhaps you can make it convenient to call at my office to-morrow. It is a terrible journey. You have no idea what it means. Months of travel, and at the very worst time of year. Wait, at all events, till the spring."

"I would start this moment if I could. I shall know no rest till I get there."

"Undoubtedly," said the Colonel, who knew a great deal more about it than she did.

By one pretext and another he managed to retard the granting of the permits for nearly two months. Then there were delays upon the road,

and a weary wait at Tiumen till the Irtish opened. So that May was well advanced before she found herself at last sitting inside the wire cage of the great convict barge which carried herself and five hundred more into exile, and watched the yellow banks drift by into the past like the lives and hopes they were leaving behind them.

CHAPTER IX

HOW HOPE SHORTENED THE LONG ROAD

IN spite of her high courage and fervent spirit, Hope Palma never recalled without a shudder the horrors of that long journey down the Volga, over the Urals, down the Irtish and up the Ob, to Tomsk, and thence along the great Siberian road to Irkutsk. The physical trials of the road, the defective supply of coarse food, the bone-bruising bumping of the springless *telégas*, the promiscuous herding at night in the filthy, unventilated *étapes*—the convict stage-houses—where the tortured children cried incessantly till they slept and sometimes never woke, and the equally tortured mothers tended them in stony despair—these things burnt themselves into her very soul, and would have broken a less courageous spirit.

Old Marya had had to be left behind. The paternal Government provided transport, such as it was, for convicts' wives and children, but Marya

had no such claim, and with unflinching kindness Hope had sent her home to her own people. And the loss of her faithful and whole-hearted sympathy was to her almost as the loss of a part of herself.

What money she had she hoarded with miserly care, for there was no knowing for what high service it might avail at the end of her journey. Every rouble might be a step towards Serge's enlargement, and she treasured her pieces as the woman of the Gospel.

And yet, at times, the miseries of those about her prevailed. The little ones crept into her heart and her purse, and precious coins were dispensed for slabs of brick tea and cakes, for any possible sweetening of the bitterness which came home to her so closely. With her sweet, firm face and glowing eyes, and the tender pity of a guardian spirit, she lived and moved among them like an angel of mercy, and smoothed their little passages—to exile or the stars, as the case might be—as well as she was able, and in such gentle ministries found relief from her own griefs and fears.

She talked with the women as they walked, learned their pitiful stories, and gave them much wise counsel, which they accepted for the sake of

her brick tea, and remembered long after she and her tea had passed out of their lives. She argued with them day by day, and scolded them by night, for their many and obtrusively undeniable sins of omission and commission. She saved many a tiny life by her care and insistence. That, indeed, was a doubtful benefit to the little ones themselves, but she could not stand by and see them die. And, by her own words and her own high courage, she strengthened into hopefulness many a heart that was weary to death of its load and embittered with the bearing of it.

But each day now brought brighter weather, and to that extent softened the asperities of the road. The birches and poplars fluttered trembling welcomes as they passed, as though they feared the law might take official cognizance of more; the children began to stray outside the slow-moving line to gather bunches of forget-me-nots and wild roses, and Hope's sore heart was gladdened and her eyes filled as the shy little tokens of their remembrance were tendered her.

The aspect of the country surprised her greatly. She had thought of Siberia as a mighty desert of snow and ice and desolate wastes. But here were great sweeps of growing corn, and pastures and farmsteadings. There were rolling rivers and rust-

ling forests. They walked in clouds of dust and the children picked flowers by the wayside.

But this was midsummer, and Siberia in summer and Siberia in winter are as different as heaven and hell.

CHAPTER X

HOW THREE PASSED WITHOUT MEETING

"ON the Volga there is a Cliff," but the bureaucrats, for reasons of their own, object to all mention of it. For it recalls a glorious time, long since, when the bureaucrats went under, and for a space a free man ruled a free race—even in Russia. And the would-be-frees still sing of that time long since—but they sing of it below their breath, for the ears of the bureaucrats are long and their hands are heavy.

There are cliffs also on the Yenisei, blue and fair, across the mile-wide stretch of swift-flowing water; and these cliffs, too, are known to free men, and known still better to those who are not free.

In a cleft of the hills on the eastern bank, three free men lay in the sun and watched the slow, methodic passage of the pendulum ferry as it swung to and fro from bank to bank. It was loaded to the brim each time it left the further

bank and it went back empty. But the crowd on this side grew but slowly, and the packed mass on the other side seemed undiminished by the stolid bites of the big black boat.

"Da!" said one of the men in the cleft. "There is no end to them."

"It is the first party of the season. They have been piling up," said one of the others.

"Women, too, and children," said the third, and thought of one woman and a possible child.

"Always women and children," said the first, "and it is a hard road they travel."

And on the crowded boat, as it swung down stream to the length of its tether, one woman looked across at the blue hills and thought that somewhere away behind them lay the man she had come so far to find, and she hoped that it was well with him.

When that load was landed there came a delay in the passage, and those who had already crossed stood up and crowded the bank to see why the boat was coming over empty. But as it drew in they saw that this journey was devoted entirely to the convenience of one passenger. He lay back in a three-horsed tarantas and seemed to eye the motley crowd on the bank with a more than usually keen and searching scrutiny.

At sight of him a hasty word flew round among the Cossack guards, and they threw up their rifles to the salute. And Hope Palma, who had been watching with the rest, sat down suddenly on the bare earth behind them, and her face was pinched and clouded as she recognized her old tormentor, Colonel Zazarin.

"Nu!" said a woman to one of the soldiers, as the carriage sped away in a cloud of dust. "The great man is in a hurry. Who is he, little father?"

"It is the new Governor of Kara. The last one is dead of the fever."

"Tell us, little father," said one of the three in the cleft, as they lay on their stomachs, chin in hand, and watched the traffic below, "why should one man have the power to do all this? After all, he is only a man, like you or me. Strip him and set him alongside me, and he is neither more nor less than a man. And yet—"

"The trouble is that if you kill him there is always another to step into his place," growled the other.

"And he, again, is only a man like the first."

"You cannot alter facts by killing men," said the third quietly, very intent upon the scene below—"unless you kill enough," he added meditatively, "as they did in France. It is a system, and he is at

the head. He is probably no worse than any other man—”

“That is not enough. When all the rest are in his hand he ought to be more than that. He ought to be the strongest and the best.”

“Originally—far back—I suppose he was. But it is the system that is wrong—”

“And we others suffer.”

“Yes, we others suffer, and will suffer till the system is altered. And that will never be done from the top, and can only be done from the bottom by the shedding of much blood. In France it ran in rivers.”

“Tell us how they did it in France, little father!”

So, lying with his chin in his hand, in the slant beams of the sun, Serge Palma told them how France had once shaken off the thrall and risen red and free. And below them the ferry swung slowly to and fro, and the crowd on this side grew greater and greater, till at last the other bank was bare, and the re-formed convoy crept slowly away along the road like a crippled snake. And Hope Palma's spirits were troubled at the thought that, in seeking the man she wished to find, she must encounter again a man whom she had every reason to fear and mistrust.

When the convoy was out of sight, and the eastern hills had relapsed into their natural solitude, the three men in the cleft stole away along the river to find some friendly fishermen who would put them across and keep his mouth shut. And so Serge Palma, known as Pavlof, six weeks escaped from Minusinsk, toiled west in quest of his wife, as she was toiling east in quest of him.

A strange chance, truly, that brought these two within touch of one another and yet withheld the meeting. But life is threaded with just such narrow dividing lines. And sometimes we cross them, and with a single step the whole complexion of a life is changed for good or ill. But more often we press on all unconscious of that which lies so close. We escape disaster by a hair's breadth and miss fortune by an inch. And, though man be never so much a free agent, it is comforting still to believe that there is a higher hand which holds the twisted threads and guides the shuttle in its flight.

The journey had been a terribly trying one, and in spite of her high spirit and her ministry of help, Hope had felt her bodily strength waning daily.

At Irkutsk, with still a thousand miles between her and Kara, and that the roughest part of the road, she broke down and lay there for a month

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with a recurrence of her fever, born, no doubt, of the deadly atmosphere of the rest-houses.

When at last she was able to take the road again, the summer was past. The bracing freshness of the autumn air was very sweet after the weariness of the sick-room. She was glad to be among her fellows in affliction again. She pressed on with new hope and unabated courage.

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CHAPTER XI

HOW HOPE FOUND LESS THAN SHE EXPECTED AND MORE

IT was with a much reduced party that Hope travelled from Irkutsk on the final journey to Kara—almost the Ultima Thule of exile, but not quite. There are exiles more dreadful in their hopeless exclusion even than dreaded Kara. With such, fortunately, we have nothing to do. The mere dry facts of life in the Yakut uluses twist the very heart-strings with pity and indignation.

Wintry weather set in before they reached the Shilka. Navigation was over for the season, and the river ice was not yet solid enough for travel. So they took the rough mountain road on foot, men and women—no children now, for which Hope was most devoutly thankful—and tramped doggedly on through the pines and firs, with the keen winds whipping their faces, and the snow wreaths laying pitfalls for their stumbling feet wherever a mountain stream had overflowed the path.

It was a terrible experience, but even the Kara Road has an end, and it was with a heart beating furiously with many emotions that Hope Palma saw at last the scattered buildings of Ust Kara lying in the white basin of the hills.

Would she find Serge alive? And if alive, in what state of misery? Anything might have happened in the eighteen months since he was taken from her.

Would Colonel Zazarin recognize her?

Would he dare to continue his attentions, to the annoyance of her husband and herself? His presence there would quadruple all her fears and troubles and all Serge's difficulties and hardships, and yet any resentment of his insidious friendliness might lead to disaster. She judged him utterly unscrupulous, and they were as absolutely in his hands, for life or death, as rats in a trap. It was surely a malign fate that threw him across her path again.

But she was growing hardened to the blows of misfortune. Hardened?—hardened to the blows, maybe, but softened by the sore heart-bruising, and wishful only to salve her wounds with the balm and oil of service, and ready to leave the rest in higher hands. For all her thinking in all these years had only brought her at last to this—that life, with all its crying wrongs and unattainable rights,

is past any human understanding, and that he or she who has looked upon these things, and known the agony of them, must take one of two courses—either abandon hope altogether, or rest it implicitly beyond the power of man.

It was the following day before they reached the Lower Diggings and trooped wearily into the great stockade of the prison, where the Governor and several officials stood awaiting them.

The roll was called over, the convicts detailed to their various homes of unrest, and Colonel Zazarin approached the group of forlorn women who had accompanied their husbands or come to join them.

One by one they were dealt with and told where to go, and Hope's heart came near to suffocating her as he approached her last of all.

"So you dared this terrible journey after all, Madame," he said courteously enough. "He should surely be a good husband for whom a wife undertakes so much." She bowed silently, and he continued—

"It was not out of any discourtesy that I left you to the last, but that I might have the pleasure of conducting you myself. If you will follow me I will take you to your husband," and she followed him in silence.

He led her out of the big prison gate and down the valley.

"You will find him better circumstanced than he might have been," said the Colonel. "And, curiously enough"—with a short laugh—"I feel under some obligation to him for having paved the way to my appointment here. They had a bad outbreak of typhus in the spring. The prisoners died like flies; the doctor died. Your husband offered to take his place"—at which Hope wondered much—"and under the circumstances he was allowed to do so"—at which she wondered still more—"though it was directly against the rules. Under his care the Governor died"—she did not feel much surprised at that.—"I do not say he would not have died in any case. Still your husband failed to keep him alive, and they pitched on me as his successor. I hesitated, I must confess. Then I decided to accept the appointment and—Ah, here we are Madame!"

They stood before a tiny house built of rough logs, with dim little windows, and long icicles hanging from the eaves. The Colonel opened the door, without knocking, and walked in.

"The nest is empty," he said. "We will wait until the bird returns. I did not tell him you were coming, because one never knows what may hap-

pen, and to raise false hopes is a cruelty. It is not a palace," he said, with a shrug, "but it is better than a kamera inside the stockade."

"It will be home," said Hope quietly, lest continued silence should provoke his resentment.

"There is no accounting for tastes," he said, with another shrug and a depreciatory glance round, at the crude brick stove with its little core of heat in a bank of white ashes, the bare floor, the rude table, the couple of comfortless chairs. It was all harsh and cheerless, and might well have excited the distaste of even a more hardened campaigner than Colonel Zazarin.

"I prefer it to St. Petersburg," said Hope, and Colonel Zazarin shrugged his absolute incomprehension of such a state of mind.

"You could have been much more comfortable there, if you had chosen, my dear. I would have—"

"Oh, don't. Pray don't. I beg of you!" And the Colonel shrugged again and kicked some snow off his boot against the stove. Perhaps the pitiful appeal of her strained white face was not entirely without its effect, upon even him.

But, as her eyes tuned themselves by degrees to the obscurity, her heart began to flutter furiously again. It was in her throat. It was choking her.

For, on the rough wooden shelf alongside the stove, stood a woman's workbasket, with some unmistakable woman's work thrown carelessly on top of it. Before the stove lay a pair of woman's slippers; from a hook hung a woman's gown; and to Hope's quickened eye there started out from the gloom—like accumulating evidences at a trial—a dozen other almost infinitesimal signs of female occupancy of the hut.

Her usually placid brows were knitted as she glanced quickly at Colonel Zazarin, in the belief that there was some mistake. He was watching her keenly, and she looked away lest he should see what was in her.

"You must give me credit for doing my best to dissuade you from coming, Madame Palma," he said, with a gleam in the dark eyes. "It is a lonely life, you know, and a loose one. Convicts have no rights, you see. They are outside the law, though at times they make laws unto themselves. And the Free Command here has its own peculiar notions, and adapts itself to its own peculiar circumstances."

Then the door opened, and a woman came in and stood staring at them. She threw off her hood and sheepskin coat, and revealed a shapely figure and a fine frank face, full at the moment of a great curiosity.

"Ah, Madame Roskova, I have brought you a visitor. This is Madame Palma come out to join her husband," said Zazarin.

"You are very welcome," said the woman, with courteously veiled amazement, and stretched a hearty hand to the astonished Hope. "The Doctor is up at the prison, but he should be in shortly. This will be a very great surprise for him. Can I offer your Excellency a cup of brick tea? Madame is quite ready for one, I can see," and she began to bustle about the preparation of it, poking up the fire and reaching down the samovar.

His Excellency made a grimace, and continued to watch Hope Palma. She had submitted dizzily to Madame Roskova's handshake. She watched her movements through a mist—of the brain as well as of the eyes.

What did it mean? Why was this woman here in Serge's house—in her place? Her face looked good. Her manner betrayed no confusion of guilt. What did it mean?

"Da!" said Madame Roskova, after vainly trying to light a small lamp. "I forgot to fill it," and proceeded to haul out a tin of oil to remedy her neglect. "Ach!"—as the tin proved empty—"I will run across and—"

Before she had got on her hood, however, there

was a sound of heavy boots kicking against the doorpost to get rid of the snow, the door opened, and Paul Pavlof came in.

In the dim light he could not at first see who his visitors were, but he expressed no surprise at sight of the official uniform. Surprise visits from the vigilant watchdogs at any time of night or day were a matter of course.

Then, recognising the Governor, he took off his cap, and said, "Ah, Excellency, we are honoured."

"I have brought you a visitor, Palma," said the Colonel.

"A visitor, Excellency?"

"Your wife."

"My—God!"—and he caught her just in time to anticipate the Colonel.

For, at sight of his entrance, Hope had sprung to her feet. And at sound of his voice she gave a little cry, and tottered two steps towards him, and fell.

"Poor dear!" said Madame Roskova, full of sympathy. "The journey has been too much for her," and would have helped him.

"Permit me, Excellency," said Pavlof, through his teeth, and carried her against his pounding heart into the tiny bedroom, boarded off one end of the cottage, and Madame hurried in after them.

"Can I be of any assistance?" asked the Governor, when he came back.

"None, I thank your Excellency. She will come round presently. Madame is attending her. No doubt the journey has been a trying one."

"And your patients?"

"The cold is helping us. Captain Sokolof has taken the turn. We shall be rid of it in a month. But it will be as bad as ever in the spring unless—"

"All your representations have gone forward, but there is no reply yet."

"Your Excellency would be amply justified in authorizing the work. It is a case of many lives or deaths."

"You know what they are," said the Colonel, with a shrug. "We are a long way off and the nearer things get the first claim. However, we will see, if no word comes. One is not absolutely required to commit suicide because those others are too busy with their own concerns. I trust your wife will not suffer from her journey."

He went out and Pavlof hurried back into the inner room.

Madame Roskova had opened Hope's cloak and dress and was bathing her forehead with cold water.

"She will be all right in a minute or two," she said. "Go and make the tea. It will do her more good than anything."

"Go you and make the tea, Anna Vassilievna, and I will see to her," said Paul, and Madame gave him her place and left them.

Presently Hope's eyes fluttered, opened, and she lay gazing starkly up in the glimmer of light that came from the fire in the outer room. Pavlof waited quietly till her eyes turned questioningly on him.

"Where is he?" she asked in a whisper.

"He is on his way back home by this time, I hope," said Paul softly.

"On his way home? Serge on his way home—and I here? Oh, my God!" and she sat up and gazed at him in a very stupor of amazement. "How? Why? What does it all mean?" jerked from her trembling lips.

"We did it for the best, as we thought, Hope Ivanovna. We met in the prison at Tomsk and changed names so that he might get back to you the sooner."

"You changed names?" she echoed vaguely.

"Serge took my place at Minusinsk for simple exile. I came on to Kara instead of him. He was to get away in the spring and get back to you

as soon as he could. Now listen to me, Hope Ivanovna, for all our lives are at stake. Here they know me only as Serge Palma. You must suffer that or Serge will suffer."

"They know you only as Serge Palma?" she gasped, repeating his words as a child repeats a lesson it does not understand.

"Yes. But you must speak softly, Hope Ivanovna. Here I am Serge Palma," he said, slowly and distinctly, "and if by any mischance they discover the truth it will mean disaster to Serge, and to you, and to me. Do you understand?"

"Oh, I do not know! I do not know. You must give me time, Paul."

"Serge," he said, in an insistent whisper. "You must call me Serge. Try to remember, Hope Ivanovna."

Here Madame Roskova came in with a steaming cup of tea, and the lamp replenished with neighbourly oil, and words of homely cheer such as she would have used to a sick child.

"Da! That is better now! Drink this, my dear, and then come and thaw yourself before the stove. Nothing like a cup of hot tea when you're feeling down. And you have got the cold of five thousand miles in your bones, I expect. And now

I must run across again to Marya Verskaïa as I promised—”

“Don’t go, Madame! Pray don’t go!” cried Hope, almost hysterically.

“Da, then! Marya will never forgive me if I don’t, my dear,” laughed Madame. “And by the time I get back you two will have found yourselves and we can talk things over comfortably.”

She still had on her cloak and hood from her late quest after oil, and now with a hearty “God with you!” she was gone.

“Come out to the stove, Hope Ivanovna,” said Paul gently. “You are frozen as Madame Roskova says.”

“My heart is frozen, I think, and my brain, too,” she said, as she dropped forlornly into the chair he placed for her, and sat gazing into the stove.

And presently, as she began to recover from the first numbing shock, and her wits began to travel, she said, like the child repeating its half-forgotten lesson—

“Here you are Serge Palma! And I—! My God! My God! What shall I do?” as it all came upon her in a heap, and she sprang up wildly as though to go.

"You must trust me, Hope Ivanovna," said Pavlof gently, and took and held one of the cold little hands.

"Yes, yes! But—"

"Listen again, Hope Ivanovna! If you will trust me all will be well. Here I am Serge Palma, and you—"

"And I—?" as he hesitated, knowing so well the fine temper of her spirit.

"For a time," he jerked hurriedly, "till we hear that Serge is clear, you will have to pass to the world as my wife. There is nothing else for it."

"My wife!"—the very words roused tumult in his heart and sent the hot blood spinning through his veins at a gallop. Ah, if it could have been so! What a heaven the bare little hut would have become. He would have asked nothing else of God.

But the words had a widely, wildly different effect on Hope.

"Pass—as—your—wife!" and she sprang up, incarnate scorn, magnificent, blazing, scarifying—she who lay so brokenly in her chair but a moment before.

"So this is the meaning of it all!"—and, if it had been, he had surely withered where he stood, scarce daring to raise his eyes to hers, lest she

should see in them that which must be in them for her alone of all women in the world until he died.

"It is for this you have planned and schemed and tricked? For this! Shame on you, Paul Pavlof!—to dupe a woman who would have trusted you with her life—and more!"

"That is hard to hear, Hope Ivanovna," he said quietly. "No such thought has ever entered my head. Still less the thought that I should ever have to tell you so. We thought only of you in the matter, but—it has miscarried. You see, we did not calculate on your coming out here."

"Then you should have done," she said angrily. "Did you expect me to sit down and fold my hands and weep? How little you know of women!"—with most withering scorn.

"It is true. . . . We thought to restore your happiness, and I was ready to give my life for it—and we have only digged a pit for you."

"I must go back," she said, the brief fire burning out already, and she turned mazily towards the door. "I will go back to Serge."

"Listen to me, Hope Ivanovna," he said, venturing a firm hand on her arm, which still shook from the storm. "I would hold my life as nothing if it could accomplish your wishes. But it cannot. It is impossible for you to go back at present.

Yours was the last convoy of the year. There are no convoys back, and the Shilka is closed. For your own sake, if not for Serge's, you must stop here for the present."

"As your wife!" spurted the volcano once more.

"Nominally as my wife—for your own sake and Serge's. For me—as the most sacred trust God ever imposed upon a man. You must trust me, Hope Ivanovna. You will have to trust me. There was a time when you would have trusted me without my having to plead for it—and I at all events have not changed."

She made an angry gesture with her hand.

"If it should become known that I am not Serge Palma, and that Serge is at large in the provinces, his chances of escape will be gone."

"And you would suffer!" scorned the final spark.

"Only in this way can I protect you from insult here—and worse. Kara is no place for a woman to live alone. Our guards are scum of the earth and have right of entry to all our houses at any time of day or night."

The thought of Colonel Zazarin and her utter helplessness overwhelmed her and she dropped back into her chair.

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned, and turned instinctively for refuge from the certain evil to the proffered help whose good faith she had never had reason to doubt before. "Paul! Paul! tell me what I must do."

He was on his knees by her side in an instant, and taking her hand he said gently, "Only trust me, Hope Ivanovna. Trust me as you used to do and not a hair of your head shall suffer while life is left me."

"Oh, I trust you! I trust you! But it is past thinking of—"

"It will come all right if you will trust me, Hope Ivanovna. Serge is to send me word as soon as he is free, and then we can arrange for you to join him. Until then you shall be as safe here as if—as if"—Ah God! as safe as if she were indeed his wife. And he knew it and she knew it—"as if Serge himself was here to take care of you," was what he managed to say.

She sat for a while gazing into the stove with pinched brow, and then with bewildering suddenness she flamed out again.

"And this—this Madame Roskova, who lives with you?"

But Paul was past the point of upsetting by any unexpected exhibition of the vagaries of the femi-

nine mind. Women had always been to him as a dainty sealed book. The high hopes he had once had of a loving study of the sacred leaves had been ruthlessly nipped in the bud. He was to learn in harder ways.

"Anna Vassilievna is the wife of Dr. Feodor Roskof, whom we all know," he answered gravely. "They were working among the poor in Petersburg, as we were in Odessa. They sent him to Yakutsk and her here. Her one desire in life is to join him, but they will not permit it, and it is perhaps just as well, for it would kill her if she went."

"But why is she here—with you?"

"She is here because it is not safe for any woman to live alone in Kara, nor for only women to live together. Madame Roskova lived alone with Marya Verskaïa in a little house up the valley. But the Cossacks entered their room night after night, on any pretext or none, so Dmitri Polokof took Marya into his house and Anna Vassilievna came here. She is a good woman and a true wife. She occupies that room. I sleep here before the stove."

"You will tell her how matters stand with us?"

"I think not," he said thoughtfully. "No!—If it ever comes out it will be better for her that she has not known."

“But—Paul!”—in a tone of pained remonstrance at his obtuseness.

“Serge.”

And then, with a discreet preliminary knock, and a hitherto unknown difficulty in finding the latch, the door opened and Madame Roskova came in.

“Da, now! That is better!” she said, beaming benevolently upon them. “Madame understands things, and is no longer jealous of me. Oh yes, you were, my dear! I could see it in your eyes. And quite right, too. I would have felt just the same myself. But there was no reason, I assure you, my dear. He is a fine man is your man, and easier to get on with than most. But my own dear man still stands first with me, and will do as long as I live. Now it’s all right. I have arranged matters with Marya and Dmitri. They can make room for me with a little squeezing, so I’ll just take with me what I need now, and the rest can wait till to-morrow,” and she bustled away towards the inner room.

“What does she mean? You are not going, Madame?” cried Hope, with the eyes of a startled deer.

“Why, child, you don’t surely think I know no better than that? Da! It is like your kind heart,

but it's ill coming in between man and wife. I've not been married twenty years without learning one or two little things, and that's one of them. Why, it'll be quite like a new honeymoon for you. No, indeed! How would I like it myself, and don't I wish I had the chance! Ah God! Yes!"

"Don't go, Madame! Pray don't go!" cried Hope, desperately. "There is no need whatever for you to go."

"And you been parted from him for nearly two years!" said Madame reprovingly. "Why, my dear, you would hate me like poison before morning."

"Oh, I won't! I won't! I promise you I won't! I will love you all the more if you will stop, dear Madame. I beg of you to stop."

"Nu, then! I do not understand!" said Madame, looking curiously from Hope to Pavlof and back again. "It is a cold wife, surely. Have you been bad to her, or is she not thawed yet? What she needs is your arms round her again, Serge Petrovitch. She has forgotten the feel of it and is a little bit afraid of you. I will take myself off as quick as I can, and then you can have her all to yourself," and she went on into the inner room, murmuring, "No, no! I know better than that,"

and they heard her still rumbling to herself like a good-humoured volcano, as she gathered her things together.

Hope's eyes, as she turned on Pavlof, were the eyes of the hunted doe at bay.

"She must stop," she said, in a fierce whisper. "If you don't make her stop I will go out and sleep in the snow, whatever comes of it." And, seeing by his face that he was at his wits' end, her own came to his relief, "Tell her I am ill and need her help."

"Anna Vassilievna," he said, going to the door of the inner room. "My wife begs you to stop—for a night or two at all events. She is worn and broken with the journey. She would be grateful for your company and assistance."

"And you? You say so too?" said Madame, coming to the door and looking out on them in unqualified surprise. "Well, well! You are a strange pair, surely! But if you ask it, Serge Petrovitch, I may not say you nay, after all you have done for me. But I must run across again and tell Marya and Dmitri, and assuredly they will think me crazy—and you too, no less."

And presently she was back again, and set about getting supper ready, but each time her eyes lighted on Hope's downcast face and languid figure, she

shook her head and said to herself, "Da! I do not understand! I hope she hasn't got the fever."

And Paul Pavlof fell asleep on his mat before the stove just before daylight, pondering vaguely the strange workings of the feminine heart and mind, slightly oppressed at thought of this complication of burdens thrown upon him by Hope's unexpected arrival, yet with a warm inner glow at his heart, like the core of heat in the white ashes of the stove, at thought of her there under his roof. Hope! Hope Ivanovna! Ah!—Hope Palma!

But in spite of it all, or because of it all, when he did fall asleep he slept soundly, for in the short space of an hour he had passed through livelier emotions than Kara usually knows in a year.

CHAPTER XII

HOW HOPE CAME SLOWLY BACK

IT took Hope Palma many days to accommodate herself to the strange circumstances in which she found herself, but it needed very little simulation on her part to play the rôle of invalid.

Five thousand miles of travel hold certainties of discomfort under the best of conditions. Five thousand miles with convict convoys—! One shudders at the bare thought of it, when the mere sight of such a travelling party chills the heart and haunts the imagination for days. It is liberty and humanity at its lowest; Might trampling Right in the mud; the apotheosis of sheer brute force and, as often as not, of sheer brutality. You cannot get away from facts, and these things are.

To any woman such a journey must needs have been packed with horrors. To one like Hope Palma, trained from her earliest days to the most

vital sympathy with her burdened fellows, vicarious sufferer in all their woes, and suffering the more the more she knew and understood,—to Hope Palma those nightmare months of travel were like the brush of a vicious censor blotting out the brightness of life with a raw black smudge. But the brush of the censor obliterates the desirable, which still at times peeps tantalisingly through; and the things that would show through this venomous smudge were horrors which neither time nor will could efface.

She had forced herself to the needs of that terrible journey by sheer force of will, and had the need continued she too would have endured. But, the necessity over, and the tight-strung nerves loosed, they lapsed in the recoil to a flaccidity quite abnormal.

For many days she lay spent and spilled, and apparently careless of living, her one primal desire for quietness and solitude.

Madame Roskova's kind heart craved much larger ministry, both bodily and mental, than was permitted it. She would have coaxed back and built up her patient's strength with cunning dishes, and reasoned her away from the past with assurances of present safety and comfort, and promises of future happiness. But Hope begged so plain-

tively to be allowed just to lie at rest that Madame could but comply.

"Just to lie quiet, dear Madame Roskova, that is all I require. I have been sorely bruised, and healing is in quiet," said Hope.

"Da!" said Madame. "I am glad I stayed. Perhaps, after all, you know best, child. When one is all unstrung like that one woman is worth ten men, even if one of them is one's husband and a doctor. I know!"

Pavlof, too, began to fear that her health had suffered permanent injury through the trials and hardships of the road, but he knew also that the hardest blow of all had been the one that had fallen upon her just when she believed she had reached the goal of all her strenuous endeavour. He knew that a sick heart makes a sick body, and at risk of forfeiting the esteem of Madame Roskova, and greatly to the exercising of her mind, he judged it truest kindness to Hope to obtrude himself upon her as little as possible.

And Madame Roskova's wonder grew with the hours. That two people, presumably attached to one another, could come together, after two years of arduous separation and biting anxiety, and treat one another as coolly as did these two, struck her as something quite abnormal and worthy of serious

attention. It was plain to a much meaner intelligence than hers that here was a serious breach of some kind, and her well-meant efforts at the healing of it caused them no little inconvenience.

Man-like, and strong in his own inflexible uprightness of intention, Pavlof saw no good grounds for Hope's extreme distaste for the only arrangement possible under the circumstances.

After all—except for the delicacy of the previous conditions that had obtained between them—it was the arrangement which not only had the sanction of the Free Command, but was definitely required by it for the safety of the female members.

It was hardly to be expected, perhaps, that he should enter into Hope Palma's feelings in all their depth and intensity. These were hers by nature and by training and by force of singular circumstance.

Every hair of her head was precious to him. To save her from injury or insult he would suffer any extremity. And she knew it, and knew too that his love for her, veil it as he might, was as strong as ever it had been, and here they were placed in surely as curious and trying a relationship as ever man and woman endured. Perhaps she feared for him. Perhaps she feared for herself. Perhaps she

knew not what she feared, and yet felt the very sense of fear a torment and a treason.

And in the shadow of that fear a coolness lay between them which sorely troubled the soul of Anna Roskova.

Madame Roskova, however, was much too discreet to talk about the matter outside. Here was something beyond her understanding, and at times she was hard put to it to keep herself in hand.

She would have given much to feel herself at liberty to discuss the whole affair with Marya Verskaïa. But Marya was young and a chatterbox, and not to be trusted in so delicate a matter. Besides, she had never been married, and so could not be expected to understand all the fine shades of abnormality which Madame's own keen eyes and ears detected in the relations of Hope and Pavlof.

She had seen many strange things in her life, and some very terrible ones, had Anna Roskova, but none had ever struck her as more curious than the behaviour of this strange pair. She puzzled over it, shook her head over it, communed much with herself over it; did everything, in fact, which a much-tried and bewildered woman possibly could do, except talk about it to other people.

She was not by nature a silent woman. In fact, to hear her cheerful tongue going at times you

might almost have thought she enjoyed hearing it herself, and possibly you would not have been very far wrong. But she had learned wisdom and the golden virtue in a bitter school and over more important, though never more puzzling, matters. And concerning any subject she considered better not talked about she could be as silent as the grave, or as loquacious as a prize parrot, and, in the latter case, with just as little import of information.

But if she denied herself outside she made up for it inside. She spoke seriously to Paul and feelingly to Hope. She reasoned, she argued, she lectured, but she could not turn them from their curious ways. And surely no sorer trial can any woman be called upon to endure than an insoluble puzzle right under her nose.

Not that she could bring herself to let them see that she was beaten. That would have been worse even than the actual fact. They saw, of course, that she was much exercised in her mind about them, and at times they were hard set to evade her pointed sallies.

"Serge Petrovitch!" she broke out one day in her brusque, motherly way, "you are not doing your duty by your wife."

"How then, Anna Vassilievna?" he answered

quietly. "All that she needs at present is rest and she is getting it. You see—"

"Oh yes, I see what I see. But all the same—" and a cryptic nod comprehended all she declined to put into words, and startled Pavlof's fears lest her womanly insight should have pierced their shaky armour. "Has she ceased to care for you, then?" and his fears vanished.

"I have no reason to suppose her feelings have changed in any way, Anna Vassilievna."

"No! Then how in Heaven's name did she ever come to marry you? You have not changed to her. I see that well enough. But she—why, it seems to me that she is absolutely afraid of you at times. Have you been hard to her—?"

"Never in my life."

"Well, well! It passes belief. Maybe in your long parting she has found—but nay, she is an angel for goodness. That I know, but as cold as ice. And then, if so, why would she follow you here? Well, well! It just means that you will have to begin all over again, Serge Petrovitch. You will have to woo her as you did before."

"She will be all right again soon, Anna Vassilievna. It is just that she is worn out with the road."

"Ah da! The road has worn her body, no doubt, but not her soul. There is fire and to spare behind that cold face unless I am blind. You must break down the barriers if you want to come into your own again, Serge Petrovitch."

"We must give her time, Anna Vassilievna."

"Ah da! Time! Life is not long enough to waste in waiting. Let yourself go, Serge Petrovitch. Do as your heart bids you. Your eyes are bright for her, and your heart is soft to her, when you are in here. But when you get in there it is like two icebergs meeting."

"She will come to herself if we give her time," was all she got for her pains, and then she would try her hand on her patient in the inner room with equal fortune.

The days passed very slowly in that narrow little room, but after all those months of arduous travel Hope was content simply to lie still, and would have been still more content if she could have lain without thinking. For much thought concerning the pass she was in tended only to confusion and tribulation of mind.

Madame Roskova was kindness itself, but to Hope's quivering anxieties there was danger to their present tranquility in the very plenitude of her thoughtfulness.

"Wouldn't you like to tell me all about it, my dear?" Madame would ask, in so sympathetic a voice that Hope could hardly resist it. For it was the thing of all others that would have relieved her own mind and the situation in every way. But Paul had decided otherwise, and he doubtless understood things better than she. And Madame's very next words confirmed the wisdom of his decision.

"There is trouble of some kind between you, I can see, and there is nothing eases one's mind like a good talk."

And therein lay the danger. For what was said in the inner room might well get outside under similar compulsion, and all their lives would be in peril.

So—"The only trouble is that I am a weaker thing than I thought, dear Madame Roskova," Hope made shift to answer.

"Da!" said Madame. "Weaker! And you come five thousand miles with the convoys, and been giving yourself away all the time, I'll be bound."

"It tells upon one afterwards," said Hope wearily. "When one is in it one just goes on and on. But afterwards it all comes back upon one in a heap. It seemed to me at first that if I lay still all the rest of my days it would not be too long to rest,

but your kindness and the quiet are giving me new life. I am very, very grateful."

"Well, well!" said Madame, permitting no evidence of repulse. "You know your own business best, my dear. But don't starve him to death. Good men are none too plentiful, and Serge Petrovitch is much above the average. He thinks of every one else before himself, and many of us wouldn't be here but for him. And when one sees him sore and troubled one cannot but feel for him. He loves you as much as ever, my dear. I can see it in his eyes," and if the little room had not been so dim she would have seen the sudden tumult of colour that flickered tremulously over the sweet, pale face.

Again and again, with the persistency of a much-puzzled woman, she returned to the charge, and did her best to arrive at a proper comprehension of this strange married pair; and that not simply for the satisfaction of her womanly curiosity, but that she might do what she could to make matters straight between them.

And many a sigh she heaved as she wished herself in Hope's place and her own dear man in Serge Petrovitch's. How different things would have been between them! Ay, though the road had worn her to rags. For every scrap of her would have

clung to his heart and drawn fresh life from it. Well, well! folks were built on very different lines and some of the lines were uncommonly queer ones.

But worn-out bodies revive more quickly than sick souls. Time came when the little inner room could no longer offer sanctuary to Hope's troubled modesty without provoking suggestion of perversity, and visibly returning strength left her no excuse for not joining the others. She had spun out the fine thread of her bodily weakness till it was thread-bare, and persistence must obviously before long translate "I can't" into "I won't."

She was looking forward with dread to the leveling of her defences, and the openness to attack to which the common routine of daily life in so circumscribed a sphere must expose her, when there came to her temporary relief one of those ghastly prison happenings which are possible only under the terrible irresponsibility of autocratic and bureaucratic power.

The tension within the little hut was slackened by the counter-irritant without, but at a cost in bodily suffering to those chiefly concerned which brought home to Hope, in tragic fashion, the rigours of the *régime* under which the community at Kara lived.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW HOPE GOT GLIMPSE OF HELL

THE Free Command at Kara was a community hybrid of the ticket-of-leave and exile systems. Prisoners who had served their terms in the prison or the mines without discredit were permitted to live outside, where and how they could, on condition that they did not leave the neighbourhood.

Government made them a trifling allowance of a few pence a day, they were permitted to receive remittances from home if there was any one there able to send them, and they might supplement their meagre incomes within certain very narrow lines if they could find any means of doing so. Exercise of the professions was absolutely forbidden, and as most of them were professional men, or in training therefor, their hardships were many.

Life in the Free Command was less like living death than the life of the prisons and the mines, but it was subject to many bitter trials, not the least of

which was the constant and ruthless surveillance of their insolent Cossack guards. At any hour of the day or night the sheepdogs might walk in upon them to see that they were still there and plotting no mischief.

More than once, Hope, lying listless in her little inner room, had been startled by the sudden intrusion of a coarse hairy face, surmounted by a fur shako, and two dull eyes, which glared stolidly at her and roved insolently round the room, and at last took themselves disappointedly away.

The officer in charge of the political prisoners and their wolfish keepers was one Captain Sokolof. Sokolof was in most respects a typical gendarme official, obstinate, conservative, none too quick of understanding outside the circumscribed routine of his profession. But, on the other hand, he was not intentionally more brutal than circumstances seemed to him to demand. He carried out the instructions transmitted to him from headquarters to the very last letter. Of his own accord he never added to them, and that was much.

His position was not without its anomalies, but he did not allow them to trouble him. Colonel Zazarin, as Governor, held supreme power, but Sokolof was in charge of the politicals, and was answerable for them, not to Zazarin, but to the Minister of the

Interior. It was a command within a command, but as Zazarin never interfered with Sokolof they got on well enough and rarely clashed.

Sokolof's right-hand man was one Lieutenant Razin, a reduced copy of his chief, smaller in body, smaller in mind, if anything still more stubbornly wedded to the last letter of the law as demeaned by the Ministry of the Interior, since all his hopes of advancement lay therein; withal something of a brute in his callosity and harshness to those in his power, and hated accordingly, both in the prison and out of it. He was a low-browed, black-a-vised fellow, with a powerful projecting under-jaw, and most of his head behind his ears like a monkey's. Pavlof took a dislike to him at first sight, and never had reason to change his opinion.

Captain Sokolof had had a sharp attack of typhus in the summer, and was still unfit for duty. During his sickness and slow convalescence his duties and his mantle had fallen on Lieutenant Razin, and Razin made the most of them. So much so, indeed, that the souls of the prisoners—to whom Razin, if he could have managed it, would have permitted no such high indulgence—were stirred within them to the supreme point of revolt. And the revolt of the utterly helpless against irresponsible power armed to the teeth is one of the strange sights of the world.

An in-prisoner at Kara possesses nothing save his bare life, and such trifling ameliorations as the irresponsibles of their grace permit him. These are at best capricious, and when the small mind finds itself in power it loses no opportunity of self-magnification by the arbitrary exhibition thereof. It fusses and worries and curtails privileges which, small as they are, are still to the prisoner very spice of the life that is drearier than death. Under such conditions the trodden worms sometimes turn, and then comes the amazing sight of the powerless fighting the all-powerful, ants *versus* giants, a struggle that stirs one even in the hearing.

How shall men—and women no less—without a weapon, make head against their keepers armed to the teeth? How shall men possessed of nothing fight legionaries with the empire behind them? Even when a man has nothing, so long as he lives he has his life; and when a man counts his life as less than nothing he rises above his nature and becomes a menace and a danger to the oppressor.

The power which strips him of everything but life thereby leaves him his sole means of defence. With their bare lives the abjects fight the ruthlessness that would trample them below the mud, and they generally win.

For, strangely enough, the autocratic power which condemns its victims to extremest bitterness of life still objects to their dying. Savage as are its methods, it still covets rank among the civilised of the earth; and an acute, hypersensitive fear of forfeiting its precarious position serves to hold its punitive hand just this side of death. It insists on life where death would be a grace. At times, indeed, its victims are driven to madness and despair. But that is not of first intention, it is incidental to the system, not authorized by it. For how shall a Government, which cannot keep its sheep in hand, control the doings of its underlings and wolf-dogs in the pastures five thousand miles away?

So when, through extra brutality, or the callous stupidity which is kin to it, the oppressed are driven to despair, they calmly say, "We prefer to die"; and, since other means are denied them, they say, "We will die of hunger," and they refuse to eat.

Then it becomes a case of endurance and bitter suffering on the one side, and of much trepidation on the other. For if these men die wholesale, and in such a manner, inquisition must follow and a calling to account. Yet the ruthlessness that has provoked so dire a test fears for its future control if it yield too soon. And so the dreadful duel goes on. On the

one side threats and futile attempts at forced feeding, followed in due course by promises; and on the other side the long-drawn agonies of slow starvation and the invincible determination to die sooner than give in.

Such is a hunger-strike among the Siberian exiles, and when Pavlof came in one day from his visitation of the prison with a clouded face, Madame Roskova was quick to perceive it.

It was the day Hope broke cover perforce and joined them in the outer room, and Madame had been jubilantly waiting his coming to reap the reward of her careful ministry.

"Here she is, Serge Petrovitch, and almost herself again! A little frozen yet, maybe, but you must complete the cure yourself. Nu! What's the matter with the man now?" as Pavlof bent and kissed Hope's forehead, and the blood rushed up into her pale face to meet his unavoidable salute.

"There is trouble up at the prison, Anna Vassilievna," he said gravely.

"What, then?" she asked, startled. For trouble inside the prison had more than once sent ripples over the high stockade, and had led to general restrictions and a tightening of bonds.

"Razin has gone too far. He has nagged and

bullied till they are desperate. They have declared a hunger-strike, and some of them are not in condition to stand much of it."

"Da! That is bad. Who is in it?"

He named a dozen or so, and at mention of some of them Madame broke out into expressions of pity.

"Da! They will die," she said forebodingly. "No one knows what it is like till they have been through it. We tried it once in the women's kamera at Irkutsk. They took away all our underclothing, that we had bought with our own money, too, and made us wear convict clothes. And they took away our mats and made us sleep on the bare boards, and they threatened to whip us. So we struck, and sometimes of a night I find myself lying in the cold and dark again, and not a scrap of food inside my lips for ten days. And mostly we were very still. The silence was like the coming of death, only full of agonies at first. And some of us moaned, though it was a point of honour among us not to, and one night I bit my finger nearly through and sucked the blood to keep myself quiet. Ah God! a terrible, terrible time! And I am sorry for them."

"And how did it end?" asked Hope, anxiously horrified.

"Oh, they gave way when two of us died. It was the fourteenth day, I heard afterwards. We lost count ourselves. You see, we just lay day and night without moving, and there was nothing to mark the time. We beat them," she said, with a gleam in her kind eyes, "but it was very terrible," and sat, hands in lap, unusually idle, brooding over the thought of it.

So deeply did their minds become engaged upon this matter that, for the moment, their personal concerns fell into the background, and Hope had time to accustom herself, unwatched, to the innumerable little awkwardnesses of the false position into which fate had cast her.

Pavlof almost lived in the prison, but refused to sleep there. The kameras at night are unwholesome at best, and he did not consider the scattered huts of the Free Command wholesome places for women to sleep alone in.

So he always came home to them sooner or later, and brought with him the shadow of the silent struggle which was going on behind the grim teeth of the great stockade.

He told them briefly of the grievous suffering patiently endured, for the agonies come first, and are followed by the lethargy which, failing respite, sinks quietly into death.

He told them, as the days passed, of the growing discomfort of the authorities. The strikers demanded the dismissal of the infamous Razin, in addition to the restitution of their abrogated privileges.

Too ready a compliance on the part of the governor would be equivalent to the hanging of a sword above his head for similar emergencies; too late a compliance meant loss of life and trouble with the authorities at home. Colonel Zazarin was a man of wrath in those days, and it was dangerous to approach him.

He would endeavor to strike the happy mean—happy, that is, for himself, but a lengthening horror for the rest—by yielding to the prisoners' demands when, in his opinion, they had purchased the right with a sufficiency of suffering. The risk lay in missing the psychological moment when the scale should stand on the even balance between life and death, and on Pavlof, as acting medico, was laid the heavy responsibility of deciding when that moment had arrived.

Day after day he spent in the gloomy kameras, gloomier now than ever, with death in its grimmest form hanging over them, waiting with the patience of the inevitable till the time should come to drop silently and finally down.

Several times each day he registered the falling temperatures and weakening pulses of the sufferers, suffering much himself in all that they endured. More than once he urged Zazarin to step down and save them. But in Zazarin's judgment the malcontents had not yet suffered enough, and he held grimly aloof. For the doctor being a prisoner himself, Zazarin took measure of him by himself, believed that he would magnify the risks, and so discounted all his representations.

Night after night Pavlof came home with gloomier face; and, full of the bitter thoughts his reports evoked in her, Anna Roskova went about her duties in the silence of a deeply touched soul which knows and understands. Her critical eye no longer troubled herself with the shortcomings of this most curious married couple. Death was abroad, nay, close at hand, and this was no time for hypercriticism of abnormal curiosities among the living. So, through the tension without and the sufferings of many, Hope's personal troubles were lightened somewhat, and her mind had little time to dwell on itself for thought of those others lying in the deepening gloom of the kameras till death should set them free. The respite was grateful to her, though the indirect cause of it shocked and wounded her sorely.

Madame Roskova questioned Paul minutely as to the symptoms of his patients each night, and lived again her own bitter experience in his telling of them.

"You will lose some of them, Serge Petrovitch," she said, with gloomy emphasis, on the twelfth night of the strike.

"I told Zazarin so yesterday. I have told him so twice to-day. Two or three are just on the line and may slip over at any time."

"He is a brute. What does he say?"

"He says that those who pull through will not forget it as long as they live."

"He is right. It wouldn't be surprising if others besides did not forget it either. The only surprising thing about it is that a man like that has been allowed to live so long."

"He is a hard man," admitted Pavlof wearily. He had just come from an ineffectual tussle with the hard man.

"Hard men and soft men are all alike when they are dead men," said Madame grimly.

"That does no good, Anna Vassilievna. The next man is just the same. The others never learn."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Madame. "If one man is killed for his brutality, the next is like to go warily lest he follow."

But Pavlof shook his head. "Force never was a remedy, and it never will be. If you killed half-a-dozen Governors there would still come one who would grind us all to powder. The spring is poisoned. Until the source is sweet the water will be bitter," and weary as he was—for the bruising of the inner man tells also on the outer—he picked up his cap and flung on his coat, and went back to see if the imminent shadow had settled down on any of his patients. If Zazarin lost any of them it should not be for lack of warning.

Hope and Anna Roskova sat before the stove hopeful of better news when he returned. But he did not come back that night, and they understood that matters were at a critical stage.

In the kinship of the great shadow, Anna Roskova began to speak of things that had come within her own experience, and Hope sat frozen with horror at the recital of hardships and persecutions almost past belief—of solitary confinements, prolonged till richly dowered minds gave way; of brutal whippings, the indignities alone of which would have sufficed to break most women's spirits; of life in the huts of the Northern barbarians, which some of their company had endured and marvellously survived; of batterings at the hands of

brutal Cossacks; of despairing suicides; of more merciful shootings deliberately provoked.

And in the hearing of such things, bravely borne by men and women whose gravest fault was too great a love for their down-trodden fellows, Hope's own troubles seemed light and of small account. She took shame to herself for taking them so much to heart, forgetting that the wearing of her body had had much to do with the depressing of her soul.

She longed to confide in Madame Roskova. The very relation of the whole matter between herself and Pavlof would have been such a mighty relief, both as to the past and as to the future. In the light of full knowledge Anna Roskova could have made things so easy and straightforward for her. But Pavlof had judged otherwise, and to act against his advice might bring down upon them, and on Serge, troubles beyond her understanding.

If Madame Roskova had some dim expectation that her own unburdening might provoke response in kind, she was disappointed. She gave Hope every opportunity, endeavoured even to lead her gently in that direction, but, in the fear of committing herself, Hope hardly dared to open her mouth about her own concerns, though she could question Madame eagerly enough as to the details of these terrible happenings. And Anna Roskova mis-

judged her of a cold and reticent nature, and marvelled at its alliance with so frank and beautiful a face.

It was midday before Pavlof came in, tired to death, but in great relief of mind. The hunger-strike was over. One of the strikers had died in the night.

"Who?" asked Madame anxiously.

"Sophie Rubova."

"Ah, the poor child. I knew her mother. Well?"

"We did our best to save her by forcing her to swallow. But it was too late. She was a mere shadow and too frail to stand any handling. I went at once to Zazarin. He was for blaming me. I reminded him of my three separate reports yesterday, of which I had copies, and he shut up. He came down to the prison and pledged his word to satisfy all their grievances. If he had only done it yesterday he might have saved poor little Sophie. But perhaps she is better dead. She would have suffered from it all her life, as some of the others will."

"It is simple murder, and that man is a devil," said Madame Roskova bitterly. "May God cast it all up to him when his time comes!"

CHAPTER XIV

HOW THEY LIVED TOGETHER AND YET APART

AS Hope had foreseen, the recovery of her health, sufficient at all events to permit of her undertaking household duties, was the signal for Madame Roskova's departure.

She had hinted at it many times, and had yielded as often to Hope's earnest entreaties and remained.

"My dear," she would say of a night, with more than a suggestion of reproof in her manner, "Serge Petrovitch and I have been very good friends, and I am greatly beholden to him, but he will begin to hate me soon if I keep you away from him like this. It is not in nature and it is not right. If you really want me to stop, you two occupy this room, and I will sleep on the hearth out there."

"No, no, Anna!" Hope would make haste to reply. "You must not go. Serge is quite content and so am I, I do assure you. It is enough for us

that we are together," and then would she blush rosy red in the merciful darkness and wonder if her soul was imperilled past redemption by such unblushing lying.

And Anna Roskova said little but wondered much, and sighed for her own lonely exile in Yakutsk, and thought again how different it would have been with them, and deemed Hope but a cold wife.

But with returning health and the retuning of her jangled nerves, Hope's outlook on life became to assume its normal aspect. Matters began to settle themselves into their proper places and to take their proper proportions. She saw that no one was to blame for what had happened, that the strange mischance which had cast her into Pavlof's keeping, while her husband wandered at large between Yeniseisk and London, was the outcome of no plot, but a valiant attempt to benefit her. She recovered her trust in herself and her faith in Paul Pavlof. She saw that Pavlof was right, and that the only thing possible to her was to wait patiently till they should hear from Serge. And she set herself bravely to adapt herself to the required conditions.

And so it was with a certain equanimity that she one day received Madame Roskova's announcement that Marya Verskaïa was sick and had begged

her to come and stop with her, and she was going on the morrow.

"Da!" said Madame, when Hope raised no objection, but simply expressed her regret at Marya's illness. "So you are reconciled to him at last and don't mind my going! That is right and as it should be, and I am glad of it."

"I am very, very grateful for all your kindness, Anna. I never can forget all you have done for me. But—as you say—"

"Da, child! That is all right! I am rejoiced to think that all is right again between you. I have thought you a stone, for the lack is not on his part. He loves you as much as ever. He is on fire for you, and no wonder. I can hear it in his voice when he speaks to you, and see it in his eye when he looks at you. He just worships you, my dear. So be you good to him, for he is a man beyond most."

And Hope knew it all and was troubled for him. For she knew that the fire would never break forth to her undoing. It might burn and burn till it consumed him, but the flame would never scorch her nor the smoke besmirch.

"You will let me bring in some of the others now and then?" asked Madame Roskova, before she went next day. "They are all hungry to see you,

and they will talk and talk and it will do none of you any harm now. It has been all I could do to keep them away. But now you are all right again—”

“Surely, Anna! I shall be glad to see them now. While I was lying broken there it would have driven me crazy, but now I shall be glad.”

So Madame Roskova squeezed into a corner of the little hut up the valley with Marya Verskaïa and Dmitri Polokof, and sorely missed the wider atmosphere of the doctor's house. For Marya had a lively tongue, and her alleged sickness did not extend to it or in any way affect it, and ceaseless chatter becomes at times a weariness to the flesh, to say nothing of the soul.

Dmitri, when he heard of Madame Roskova's coming, breathed a silent but fervent “God be thanked!” and welcomed her warmly. Marya launched twenty questions at her concerning Madame Palma before she had got her cloak off, and Anna, knowing her friend, replied with discretion and supplied no grist but only chaff to Marya's chattering little mill.

So Hope Palma and Paul Pavlof entered upon a new phase of the strangely twisted story of their lives—a phase which tested and tried them both in many ways, and was to Pavlof as the breaking of

seals and the dipping, chancily and hazardously, into the pages of the unknown. He learnt much of woman and her ways, and at times it set his head spinning, and at times twisted his heart-strings. Learning is bitter-sweet; at times a deep delight, and again, a long travail; and the understanding of even one woman was beyond the wisdom of the Preacher whose experience had been wider than most.

They sat long before the stove in silence that first night of their solitariness, both their minds running swiftly in the same direction but on different lines.

When would they hear from Serge?

Would they ever hear from him?

Supposing they did not?

Supposing they heard of his death?

The silence was verging on the irksome when Pavlof broke it, in fear that it might become painful to her.

"I am glad you let Anna Vassilievna go, Hope Ivanovna. It tells me that you trust me."

"She has been very good to me and I shall always be grateful to her, but—"

"Since you can trust yourself in my hands, it will make things easier for you to be without her, I think."

"It would have been impossible to go on much longer like that."

"She is a good woman—"

"She was growing importunate about us. If we could only have told her the whole matter—"

"A whisper of it getting out would have destroyed us all. Anna Vassilievna is more trustworthy than most, but the matter is so very strange that it would have been almost too much to expect her to keep it entirely to herself. Even if she did not speak of it her manner might have set folks wondering, and one cannot be too careful when lives are at stake."

"I have no doubt you are right. In any case it is too late to tell her now," she said quietly.

There was in this new atmosphere a sense at once of relief and restraint. With Anna Vassilievna's puzzled eye no longer on them, they were able to be themselves again, without necessity for guarding every word and look. And this in itself was a mighty relief, for false pretence is mother to awkwardness, and the natural man is the honest one, the man who is just himself and claims no more.

And now, too, they could discuss their affairs in a way that was not possible before, and therein also lay elements of enlightenment.

But, even in this new freedom, there was also a novel sense of restraint, in the ever-present knowledge that they two, of all people in the world, were alone together in surely as strange and anomalous a companionship as the world had ever seen.

And these mingled feelings again made at once for speech and for silence, and so their talk was intermittent and discursive.

Pavlof, when he spoke to her, kept his eyes rigidly on the glowing embers, lest she should see in them that which would not be suppressed, but which he still would not have her see. And how should he, untutored man, know that she saw it all in the very stiffness of his manner, that it cried aloud to her in every tone of his voice whenever he pronounced her name.

For to woman has been given a sense denied as a rule to man. She knows by instinct when a man loves her. And Hope Palma knew that this man loved her still, in spite of himself, as much as he had ever loved her, and that was with every fibre of his being.

And so, when her eyes rested on him, she already found a difference in him since Anna Vassilievna left them. For eyes, after all, are but windows, and the soul that looks out of them colours all it sees with somewhat of itself.

And yet, again, perhaps, after all, there was in him a subtle and almost indefinable change bred of these new circumstances—the unintentional outward manifestation of these mixed feelings of freedom and restraint. He was at once stiffer and gentler than when Anna was there. For then he had to assume a warmth of demeanour befitting their supposed relationship, and to both of them it was merely an assumption and meant nothing. And now that no assumption was necessary, though all the warmth was in him still, his fear lest his real feelings should show through stiffened his manner and made it seem unduly cold and formal.

Many were the nights they sat so, during the first weeks of their release from Madame Roskova's kindly supervision, discussing at times, and from every point of view, Serge's chances of escape and the prospects of their hearing of it, but as often sitting in the silence of their long, long thoughts.

"You really think Serge would be able to get clear away, Paul Ivanuitch?" she would ask.

"From all we could learn there was no great difficulty, Hope Ivanovna. It is not like Kara, you see. Will you pardon me reminding you again that here I am Serge Petrovitch—"

"Oh, I am sorry. I cannot get used to it."

"It is only that I fear if you call me Paul Ivanitch in private it may slip out at other times and lead to trouble."

"I will remember. You see, I have always thought of you as Paul Ivanitch, and it is not easy to begin thinking of you as Serge Petrovitch."

"I know, and I am sorry for the necessity. If it were not of importance I would not ask it."

"And when do you think is the soonest we could hear from him?"

"He would get away in the early spring. It might take him some months to get back to Russia. He would strike up north, which would make it longer but safer. Then he would seek you first. Where would he learn that you had come out after him?"

"Old Masha would tell him that, if he found her."

"He would seek her at once when he could not find you. Where would she be?"

"I had to send her back to her people in Old Khersonese. They had been very good to me when I was ill—when my baby was born."

"Ah—God, yes!"—with a face full of sympathy—"I did not dare to ask you, Hope Ivanovna. Serge told me. What—did it—?"

"He died. And I was glad. Such a dear little fellow! But when he was dead I knew it was best so."

"It was very sore upon you, Hope Ivanovna."

"It was hard to lose him, but I knew it was better for him, and so I did not mourn for him, and in my heart I have him always."

It was only round the stove at night, however, that they had time for disjointed conversation, or, as the case might be, for brooding thought. Pavlof was working energetically with brain and hand to stamp out the hidden germs of typhus from the prison kameras—as far as that was possible without burning the whole place down. It was an almost impossible task. Hercules himself would have given it up in despair and applied the cleansing flame.

He talked hard and worked harder. But the Governor, absolute as were his powers over his prisoners, would not authorize the expenditure of a single rouble on sanitary matters without express permission from headquarters. Roubles were none too plentiful and had to be accounted for to the last kopeck. Men and women were sent there because they were superfluous. As Zazarin tersely put it, "Lives are cheap, but money is always dear. If we

tell them a man is dead, that ends it; but roubles never die, and we have to account for them."

And Hope had the housework to attend to, and, since it was but a small house, and she had much time and a natural instinct for neatness and making the most of things, she brought and kept it up to such a high plane of comfort that Paul Pavlof hardly knew himself in it. Comfortable, in a way, it always had been under Madame Roskova's rough-and-ready housekeeping, but Anna Vassilievna's time had always been subject to many outside calls from the sick and needy ones, which had not yet fallen upon the newcomer, and—well, Hope's ideas of comfort went further than Anna Vassilievna's.

Pavlof was so full of his Augean labours that he must discuss them with her of a night, and Hope rejoiced in the new element as a relief from the tension of those long brooding silences, which at times became beyond endurance painful.

Then Madame Roskova began to bring in her friends, who had been waiting impatiently to make Madame Palma's acquaintance, and once they began coming the little house was rarely free of them. For, since the privilege of visiting among themselves was about the only privilege the Free

Command possessed, they availed themselves of it to the full.

Their lives were hard and meagre, but in many cases their capacities for enthusiasm, and even their enthusiasms, had survived their sufferings. How they managed to live on the trifling allowance made by the paternal Government they would have found it difficult to explain. Their condition, indeed, was almost analogous to that of the proverbial villagers who wrung a livelihood out of one another's washing. Anna Roskova, for instance, earned scanty kopecks by mending and stitching for the officers of the guard. Then there were occasional trifling remittances from friends at home, some of which reached them and some of which did not. But all helped one another, and among them they fought the wolf from the door.

They were most of them men and women of education and utterly unused to manual labour, save such as the mines had painfully taught them. And, since there was no opening for the professions, even if they had been allowed to follow them, they just grubbed along from hand to mouth as best they could and stubbornly refused to starve. They ate little and thought and talked much.

Paul Pavlof—whom they knew only as Serge Palma—was better circumstanced than most, by

reason of his quasi-official duties. But his own wants were of the smallest, and his hand and house and slim purse had always been open to all who needed help.

Naturally, that house became the life-centre of the community and had rarely been without visitors of an evening, until the arrival of that least expected of all visitors turned the world upside down for some of them.

While Hope lay in the little inner room, desiring nothing but quiet, Anna Roskova had rigidly forbidden visitors the house, and the cheerfulness of the community suffered eclipse. Now that the shadow had passed they returned with doubled enjoyment, and Hope need never lack company.

They rejoiced in her courage in compassing that wearisome journey, and one and all made much of her. They brought her books and papers, such as they had, and were ready to sit and talk by the hour of Russia and their nipped hopes and blighted endeavours.

When the distasteful day was over they came quietly in, one by one, and, over the steaming samovar of coarse brick tea, lived their lives again, and even ventured at times to entertain hopes of the future.

Their eulogies of "Serge Petrovitch," his courage, his self-denial, his sympathetic care of both hale and sick, knew no end. They rang the changes on his high qualities of heart and mind, till —when she remembered that the Serge Petrovitch of these encomiums was not her Serge Petrovitch —she sometimes tired of hearing them. And again, at times, as the praises of this Serge Petrovitch were ringing in her ears, they would attach themselves by some strange perversion of the senses to that other Serge, and she would think more tenderly of him than ever.

And then when, one by one, the rest had crept quietly away to their comfortless little homes, envious somewhat, perhaps, of the happiness of Palma and his beautiful wife, they two would sit brooding over the handful of ashes in the stove, thinking out their own thoughts, their elbows almost touching, but between them a great fixed gulf.

"Is he alive or is he dead?" Hope would ask herself. "Is he in outer exile or pining in prison? Or has he won through to freedom, and is he spending himself and risking himself trying to find out what has become of me? Shall we ever learn what has become of him? How long shall I wait here? Where can I go if I leave?"

And all her questions remained perpetual questions and there was no answer to any of them.

And Pavlof, at her elbow, gazed steadily into the little core of rosy life among the grey ashes, and asked himself—

“Is he alive or dead? Shall we ever get word from him? And if we do not, what is to become of Hope Ivanovna? She will not be content to remain here. And yet—and yet—”

He wished her nothing but good. To compass her happiness he would willingly lay down his life, as he had done once already in taking Serge's place at the mines. He wished Serge nothing but good. He had proved it. And yet—and yet—

If Serge was dead—if the fiction of their lives could blossom into fact! Ah, the glory and the joy of it! The heaven of Kara! He would ask no better than to live there and die there, so she were there too.

How was it possible to restrain such thoughts with that quiet figure at his elbow, with the sweet, clear-cut face, and the great brooding eyes?

But when at last she rose and he quietly bade her good-night, though his voice told nothing of what was in him and the shadows veiled his eyes and face, she read him like a book, and held him in

honour because of the strong, true heart that was in him.

And when she was gone he unrolled his mattress and stretched himself on it before the stove, and dreamed of heaven on earth in a Kara hut, such as none but he would have rejoiced in—unless he were blessed with the love of a Hope Ivanovna.

CHAPTER XV

HOW PAVLOF LEARNED HARD LESSONS

SO the wintry days of their strange, anomalous life dragged on, and held no weariness of waiting for Paul Pavlof, rather a fulness of content as of one who, believing his treasure was lost to him for ever, has unexpectedly found it again.

But it was not so with Hope, and Pavlof got many an amazing sight into the sealed book, and learned more of women's ways than most men learn in a lifetime.

For he had his regular duties outside which kept his highest faculties alert and active. And she had too much time for painful thought, and, to a woman of Hope Palma's nature, the very fact of having to live and act so flagrant a lie as circumstances had forced her into was to her feelings as the rasping of a file on a raw wound.

At times her heart grew sick with the weary indefiniteness of it all. She said to herself that she might wait and wait for ever, and waiting is the

hardest work in the world. Then, when the fit was on her, she would break out, as she brooded over the fire of a night—

"Is this to go on for ever? Shall we ever hear from him?"

In their private intercourse she had come to discard the use of any appellation when addressing him. It lent a curtness to her speech which was foreign to her, but he understood her feeling, and suffered it without resentment. Paul Ivanuitch she must not call him, and Serge Petrovitch felt to her each time like a fresh endorsement of the lie that troubled her.

"We shall hear in time, Hope Ivanovna."

"You say it and say it, but shall we?"—defiantly.
"Suppose we never hear?"

"Then—but we shall hear, Hope Ivanovna. There has barely been time yet for word to come, even if he got through at once. If I could shorten the time for you I would, but I cannot."

"It breaks my heart to think of him searching and searching and finding nothing, and wondering what has become of me."

"It is very sore for you, but we are doing the only thing possible."

"In the spring I will join a convoy and go back and look for him."

"If you think well," he would answer gloomily. "But where you would look I do not know. He might well be on his way back here in some guise or other, and then you would pass him on the road."

"You do not want me to go," she would fling at him.

"I would give my life to serve you, Hope Ivanovna. But I could not counsel you to go in-search of him, for I fear it would be fruitless. He promised to let me know in such a way that no censor could guess what he meant. The moment we hear I will do everything in my power to further your going. Till then you are safest here, and I think Serge would have it so."

At other times she would fall into such a state of dull depression that Pavlof could hardly get a word out of her, and then he went gloomily, and watched anxiously for a recrudescence of the sickness from which she had suffered at Irkutsk. But it was heart-sickness that at such times made the body seem sick, and she would not allow him to doctor her.

And again, in the baffling vagaries of her brooding thought, she would find herself doubting him—him whom her better self knew to be the very soul of honour. And more than once her resentment at this sore bondage of fate showed itself unworthily

in words that cut like arrows. It was all his fault. If he had let Serge come on to the mines she would have found him there. It was Pavlof's stupid interference that had set everything wrong and landed them all in this hateful coil.

And Pavlof, if he understood but dimly, trusted much, for he loved much. He suffered acutely because his hands were tied. There was nothing he could do but bear with her always with the utmost gentleness, and that he did.

"It is Hope Ivanovna," he would say to himself. "And she is tried beyond bearing."

He had given his life for her husband's, and she resented it and regarded him as an interferer. It taxed his equanimity to the utmost at times, but never by word or look did he show sign of what was in him, nor did he ever depart by a hair's-breadth from the straight line he had laid down for himself. He kept strictest guard on voice and look, and tuned them delicately to the necessities of the case, and bore with her patiently like the gallant gentleman he was.

But if he never flinched under her flailings, and showed no sign of wound, she knew when her arrows pierced. Then, in due course, she would recognise the wrong she had done him, and the swing of the pendulum would carry her to the other

extreme. To salve the wounds she had dealt she would unbend towards him and become sweetness itself. To wipe out the memory of her ungraciousness she would become more than gracious.

And then in turn—and it needed a stout heart and a set jaw at times, for her sweetness was harder to be borne than her undeserved bitterness—it seemed to be he who was cold and hard, and held her at a distance.

But these were her extremes. Between times, and always, except when these gloomy fits mastered her, she was just her own sweet, high-spirited, clear-souled self, deeply interested in all his doings and in the welfare of the community, and life became sweet to Paul Pavlof.

If ever man was tried and tested to his heights and depths, it was Pavlof in this earlier period of their companionship.

To live in such strange case with the one woman who was more to him than all the rest of the world—so close to her—one with her to the general eye—bound, by the exigencies of the case, to tender her before others all those little observances of affection in which his heart would have rejoiced beyond words had they only been real—outwardly, all the happiness he had ever dared to hope for—inwardly, the keen sting of the mockery of it all!

Yes, he suffered much. "Without sorrow no one liveth in love," says old à Kempis. But at the heart of the sting was that keen, deep joy which is the very soul and core of love.

Can one wonder that his thoughts slipped brakes at times and ran wild and free? The wonder would have been if they had not, for after all he was but human.

Suppose no word ever came from Palma?

He had done all he could for his friend. But, at best, his chances were about even. Some indeed escaped. Thousands got away every spring, and blindly prowled the steppes and forests till the winter drove them in again. But the percentage who got clear away to freedom was not large. Still, there was always the chance, and Serge Palma had staked on that chance, and he was a man of intelligence and resource, and would strain every nerve to win through.

And if no word came?

Then—well, it would either mean that he had failed and been recaptured, or that he was dead, which was much the same thing; or—there was the trouble—that the word he had sent had never got through.

He might even then be vainly striving after news of his wife, while she sat here waiting in vain for

news of him. And so it might go on, month after month, till Hope grew desperate. Then she would desperately set out to find him, an utterly hopeless task, to search the whole wide world to find one man, and that man as like as not dead.

If no word came, their position would remain just as it was until Hope left him, and was lost to him forever. While she remained, he felt as a man may feel with whom a priceless gem is left in trust, and lies for safety in his banker's care. He gets no actual good of it. He dare not wear it. He may look at it at times, that is all. But still the knowledge that it is there, and in his charge, gives him a certain glow of satisfaction.

Just so Paul Pavlof carried in his inmost heart the priceless jewel of his love for Hope Palma. She belonged to another, and that other his friend, and so to him she was sacred. But no power on earth could keep him from worshipping her with all the might that was in him.

But, dimly behind all this, lurked two possibilities, either of which might solve the situation.

The one—that Palma, if recaptured, might be sent to the Kara mines—a more than likely possibility. For though the officials, for the benefit of their own pockets, might wink at escapes, recapture entailed severest punishment.

The other—that definite news might reach them, from Serge himself, of his escape, or through some of the constantly arriving prisoners that he was dead.

In his capacity of doctor, pending the arrival of a successor to the late official, Paul had access to the prisons, and he questioned all newcomers cautiously for news. But in this the utmost care was necessary, for his position was utterly irregular and in flagrant contravention of all official rules. It was dependent on the caprice of a man who had every reason to regard him as an obstacle in his path. It was only the general fear of a further outbreak of the terrible prison scourge, which permitted him to exercise his profession at all. For typhus is no respecter of uniforms, and when once it got loose there was no knowing where it would stop.

Colonel Zazarin dropped in occasionally to see if Madame Palma was sickening of life at Kara; the gendarmes called at least once every day, as they did at the house of every out-prisoner, to see that they were still there; and of friendlier visitors she had no lack.

But at times Hope Palma's heart grew so weary of this shadowed waiting, that she came to feel, at last, that news of any kind, even the worst, would be better than no news at all.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW THEY SAT SIDE BY SIDE WITH A GULF BETWEEN

ONE day, as winter was drawing towards the spring, Pavlof received a customary order to inspect a convoy of newly arrived prisoners.

Since the epidemic of the previous year the officials had exercised unusual precautions, more with a view, however, to their own safety than from any special care for the rest. These entailed no expenditure of money and little trouble for themselves. Each convoy as it arrived was carefully inspected, for life in the *étapes* was an inducement to disease. To one who had passed through those hotbeds of vice and infection himself, it seemed a miracle that any could possibly come through uncontaminated.

The authorities at St. Petersburg—busy just then with more important matters—had taken no slightest notice of the Governor's request for a successor to the late medical officer. So Pavlof, in the exercise of his duties, subjected every arrival, male and

female, to careful examination, and promptly isolated every suspicious case. With a view to the utilisation of waste material, they were tended in hospital by female prisoners of some standing, under the distant but arbitrary oversight of Cossack sentries, whose natural density led them at times to interfere between nurses and patients when neither had dreamt for a moment of overstepping the most rigid disciplinary bounds. But they were, for the most part, dull-witted, low-browed, bullet-headed fellows, whose narrow understandings were capable of little beyond the fact that these were prisoners and they their warders. Coarse-grained by nature, their feelings had become pachyderm through constant contact with suffering humanity, and their highest aspirations might safely have been packed into a glass of vodka.

Many a strange meeting took place in that wretched hospital. In spite of the vigilance of the officials, it became a regular bureau of information concerning the happenings in the outside world.

The news, indeed, that trickled through was many months old, but it was of a very definite character, and concerned matters of very special interest which the rigid censorship would never have admitted in any other way. For the letters to the Free Command were subject to severest scrutiny and

most abominable mutilation, and reached them occasionally, when they reached them at all, in fragments which taxed their ingenuity sorely at times to make head or tail of.

Among the abjects subjected to Pavlof's scrutiny that day was one whom he recognised, in spite of travel-wear and tangle, and a quick glance of surprise passed between them.

Mikhail Barenin had been one of the circle in Odessa to which Hope Arskaïa and himself, and later Serge Palma, had belonged. Paul promptly consigned him to hospital as a suspicious case, and presently visited him there.

"So you have come to join us, Mikhail Mikhailovitch?" he whispered, as he laid a professional hand on his patient's wrist.

"And you, Paul Ivanuitch? How come you on the side of the oppressors?"

"Force of circumstances. The doctor died of typhus. They were scared out of their lives, so they let me take his place till a new one comes. It enables me to serve my friends at times. But listen, Mikhail Mikhailovitch, and do not forget! I changed names on the road with Serge Palma, and here I am known by his name."

"I will remember. You may wear it without fear of disturbance."

"How? You have news? Tell me quick," and his heart was in his throat at thought of what this might possibly mean for him—and to Hope.

"Serge Petrovitch—Palma—is dead. He was shot in an attempt to escape."

Pavlof's face burned red as his released heart sent the hot blood whirling on its way. He ground his teeth to keep his face from twisting. He closed his eyes for a moment lest the light in them should blaze his secret abroad.

"You are sure of this, Mikhail Mikhailovitch?" he asked, when his thumping heart gave him leave to speak.

"Quite sure of the report. I was not there to see. But it was accepted as true before I left."

"We will speak of it again"—as the Cossack sentry sauntered towards them. "I can keep you here for some days. The rest will do you good. Remember, I am Serge Palma."

The other nodded and closed his eyes wearily. The comforts of a prison hospital were slight, but it was heaven compared with the pestiferous étapes and crowded kameras and the drudgery of the mines.

Paul Pavlof had enough to occupy his mind that day, and as he lay on his mattress before the stove

at night his thoughts tossed him to and fro and gave him little rest.

Before morning he had decided that Mikhail Barenin must be told of Hope's presence there, and how it came about. For an unlikely, but still possible, chance encounter between them, even at a distance, might otherwise lead to trouble.

As to telling Hope of the report of Serge's death, he could not make up his mind.

He debated it with and against himself, and tried to look at it in every possible light.

If he could have been absolutely assured of its truth he would not have hesitated. But he could not be sure. It might be true. It might very likely be true. It was just as likely to be true as not. Nay, he said to himself at last, it was more likely to be true than not. And thereupon brought himself to with a round turn and took himself soberly to task.

For, after all, looked at coldly, calmly, judicially—points of view only to be arrived at after severest condemnation of the self-confessed prisoner at the bar—it might not be true, and, above all thought of himself, was his thought for her, and—ay—of her. For, do what he would, now that the door of possibility, of probability—must he with shame confess it,—of hope, was unlatched by Mikhail Barenin's

news, his thoughts refused the leash and ran freely. They leaped barriers, and climbed ladders whose end might rest in Kara snows, but whose summits touched rosy heavens. For a man may control his judgment, his words, his looks, but his thoughts have a will of their own and a way of their own, and when they take the bit it is time for him to pray that he may be delivered from evil.

He saw Barenin again next day, and under cover of a careful examination of his patient, while the sentry looked on suspiciously from a distance, he managed to tell him what he wished.

"Put out your tongue," Barenin," he said, "and listen to me before the watchdog barks. Hope Palma is here—keep your tongue out, man—she came expecting to find her husband, of course. We have been waiting news. I have not told her yet lest it should not be true. I am supposed to be Palma. She is supposed to be my wife. She lives in my house since it is not safe for a woman to live here alone. But she lives only in hope of word from Palma so that she may join him. Now you understand the situation?"

"I understand." There was a twinkle in his eye as he added, "For your sake I hope the news is true."

"I wish only her happiness."

"We know that who know you. It was a surprise to us all when she married Palma. Every one thought—"

"Here comes the sentry. Your wrist— So! You must remain here a day or two still. I will see you to-morrow."

At home he imposed so strict a guard upon himself, lest the tumult which Barenin's news had excited in him should escape in look or tone, that to Hope it seemed that he had suddenly become cold and distant as never before.

Time and restored health had made her almost her old self again, capable once more of calm, wide views of life, and less given to fits of bitter despondency, though these indeed still came upon her at times. Now, taking blame to herself for his coldness, she tried back in her mind for cause given, and failed to find it in spite of most rigorous searching.

She knew him too well to believe him capable of ill-feeling for her past offences; and had she not shown him by subsequent gracious meekness that her declensions came not of herself, but of her circumstances?

Finally, unaware of the fundamental upheaval wrought in him by Barenin's news, she said to herself that the complexities of their position were try-

ing them both too hardly, and that the time had come for a change.

Yet where to go and what to do? Any move might be the wrong one and deprive her of the news for which she was waiting.

She could not, like Anna Roskova, find another lodging. For where should Serge Palma's wife live except with Serge Palma? And as to getting away, the risks and difficulties would be enormous. The nightmare horrors of the convoys and rest-houses still overwhelmed her at times, and, deep in heart, unacknowledged, not to be thought about, but still there, was a deep, comforting sense of peace and security in Pavlof's guardianship, and a very great disinclination to lose it. She was at her wits' end, and sorely troubled in her mind as to what course to pursue.

Paul had not dared to tell her of Barenin's presence at Kara. She would inevitably ask if he brought any news, and then he must disclose the whole matter.

Meanwhile he gripped his heart and treated her with the gravest courtesy. He provided for her comfort in every way within the compass of his power and the limited possibilities of Kara. But, by reason of the fire that was in him, he bore himself coldly perforce, hard as it was to do so, lest the

slightest divergence from his narrow line should lead him astray into the open country of his heart's desire, and show her that which he was doing his best to keep from her.

And she? Trust her, she knew, somewhat at all events, of that which was in him, in spite of all his iciness and aloofness. And perhaps she feared somewhat for herself, and perhaps she feared somewhat for him. But always, except at those rarer and rarer intervals when her heart got twisted awry with the long strain of waiting, she thought of him warmly and gratefully.

Yet, now and again, after sitting in long silence before the stove of a night, the falseness and awkwardness of their position would spur her to speech, though the result was always the same. And—

"How much longer are we to go on in this way?" she would jerk out.

"What would you do, Hope Ivanovna?"

"Oh, I do not know, but I feel that I ought to be going."

"Where would you go?" At which she would shake her head hopelessly.

"I do not know, but I feel myself a burden to you."

"You know better, Hope Ivanovna," and he

would strive to make that statement as colourless as possible.

"Shall we ever hear?" she would ask.

"God knows," and he thought of Barenin.

They never got much further than that, and she remained there, waiting, waiting, waiting, for the news which never came—a captivity of the spirit, harder to bear in some respects than the thralldom of the mines, though here, indeed, redeeming features were not entirely lacking.

But as time passed, and the absence of the promised word from Serge himself lent countenance to Barenin's news, Paul decided at last that she must be told.

He was quite aware that the anxiously expected letter might even then be lying in the hands of the officials as a suspect, might have been there for months, might never be delivered. Such things were by no means uncommon. Many a perfectly innocent letter, full of homely tidings into which morbid officialism read things undreamt of by the writer, was never delivered at all, and many a heart sickened and died of starvation in consequence.

He had a great fear, too, that this news of Barenin's, when she heard it, might bring about changes in their delicate relationship — changes which might not be for the better.


It seemed to him, indeed, at times that matters could hardly be more trying for them than they were, and yet—there was no knowing. This word of Barenin's might be like the dropping of an acid into a delicate solution, resulting in spicules and facets, in the instant formation of frosty points and angles where, before, all was colourless quiescence and limpid clearness. For, after all, Hope Ivanovna was a woman, and, little as he knew of women and their ways, he had seen enough of late to know that they are unaccountable at times and not to be understood of men.

She would regard him with different eyes. Would her glance be more kindly? Or would he find there, or imagine, new suspicions of himself and all his motives?

She would understand, in part at all events, the coldness and aloofness to which he had schooled himself so rigorously. Would she ascribe it to fear on his own account or on hers?

Would she after all understand that his coldness was meant in kindness—that if he had been over cold it had been through fear of being over kind?

For while Serge lived—if Serge lived—he stood between them as inviolable as a law of God. But if Serge were indeed dead, then there was no law, of



God or man, that could keep them apart—if both their hearts so willed it.

No further news filtered through to them. Serge's promised letter never came; and at last he decided to tell her, and, having decided, still put off the telling from day to day in dread of the result.

Then one night, as they sat in silence before the stove, he said abruptly, "You remember Mikhail Barenin?"

"Surely," she said quickly, and gazed at him hungrily. It was a link with the past. It might mean news.

"He is here—in the prison."

"Ah?" she said with a quick swallow of her hopes and fears. "And he brings news?"

"He brings a rumour—but it may not be true."

His words prepared her for ill news. She eyed him anxiously.

"He says that when he left Odessa it was understood there that Serge had been shot in attempting to escape—"

"Ah!" she gasped. "And it was through you—"

Then her little round chin sunk on to her chest, and her bosom heaved convulsively.

"Yes," he began bitterly. "It was through me—" and stopped.

It was unjust, cruelly unjust. But he choked it down and sat in silence gazing into the ashes. Jangled heartstrings emit strange discords at times, even in a man, and he knew it. And this was a woman, and the woman he loved more than anything on earth.

All the same, as he sat there, life felt to him like a handful of grey ashes. All his hopes were trembling in the balance, but not by a word would he sway the balance either way.

"Give her time, give her time," he said to himself. "It is Hope Ivanovna. She will come to herself."

And she did. For the sobs died away at last, and presently she stretched a trembling hand round towards him, and said falteringly, "Forgive me, my friend—I was unjust.—You did it for the best—"

He took her hand very gently, and bent and kissed it, and she got up and went away to her closet.

The grey morning light showed how little she had slept. Her face was white and anxious, the circles round her eyes were darker than ever. Her first words were—

"When did Mikhail Barenin come?"

"Three months ago."

"And you have known it all this time! Oh, why—"

"We do not know even yet that it is true, Hope Ivanovna."

"Does Mikhail believe it is true?"

"He said it was generally accepted as true," he said gravely, "but rumour often lies, and rumour from Siberia—"

"Why did you not tell me before?"

"I did not wish to distress you—"

"Why did you tell me now?"

"I thought much before I did so. I tried to view the matter from all points. I decided at last that it was right you should know. I could not but see the distress the long suspense is causing you."

"It is terrible," she said miserably. "It will kill me. This not knowing if he is alive is worse almost than knowing that he is dead."

"It leaves us hope."

"Hope dies of want," she said sadly.

"Hope must not die," he said. "When hope dies life is not worth living."

It was bravely said, for he could not but know that, if that other hope did finally die through lapse of time, then there might be hope—aye, and Hope—for him.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW PAUL FOUGHT THE TERROR AND MADE A FRIEND

AS Kara slipped slowly out of its winter fetters, and the skies brightened and the earth softened to the spring, typhus began at once to make head again in the crowded prison.

With the very inadequate means at his disposal Pavlof fought it, day and night and life by life; but in spite of his most strenuous efforts the fever spread like a prairie fire. The conditions were perfect. The harvest was ripe. Last year's sparks still smouldered in the pallid forms of the grey-coated prisoners and needed little to fan them into flame.

What one man could do almost single-handed, that Paul did. But he was like a lone man on the prairie beating wildly at the flames with his coat. He flung himself body and soul into the fight, without thought of himself, without undue thought even of Hope, but not without thought for her.

He insisted on Anna Roskova returning to his house to keep her company while he was away, and he himself lived—not in the prison, for that meant almost certain death—but as near to it as he could, in the guard-house adjoining, where he could be at death's call at any and every moment of the day and night.

The scourge grew with the heat. That year, when the cuckoo cried, the desertions were on an unparalleled scale. The captives fled for dear life as well as for dear freedom. And the guards almost winked at their flight, for if they stopped it would only be to feed the fever and to divert the attention of the doctor from sufferers of more consequence.

Captain Sokolof, in charge of the political prisoners, had had a sore wrestle with the fever the previous year. Pavlof had foretold another certain outbreak in the spring, had advised him to apply for leave and go home, had warned him urgently of the danger of stopping.

Sokolof accepted the advice, the warning, the danger, but he did not go. Stopping might possibly mean risk to life. Going meant certain loss of pay and position. As a soldier and a poor man he took the risk for the sake of the position and the pay.

It was an essential part of the captain's duties to inspect the prison kameras at regular intervals. The atmosphere of the kameras was that of a newly opened sewer. Nevertheless, since the regulations called for inspection, Captain Sokolof inspected them and met the fever again half way.

By midsummer half the Cossack guard was down, the rest went in mortal fear, and Pavlof's star stood high. They looked to him as their only possible saviour, and followed his instructions implicitly.

Harsh, hard, ignorant peasants most of them, with little feeling and less intelligence, this insidious, creeping death struck panic into them. It is doubtful what they would have stopped at doing if Paul had so ordered. But he wisely restricted his measures so as to offend as little as possible against their instincts of discipline, and they never dreamt of obstructing or thwarting him.

In spite of all warnings, Captain Sokolof kept on his feet to the very last moment, and was in and out of the kameras long after he should have been lying quietly in a tent on the hillside.

But the most obstinate and determined of men must knock under when typhus says the word, and there was no exemption for Sokolof.

The man's courage, which after all was perhaps quite as much dogged obstinacy, appealed strongly to Paul, and he determined to save him if salvation were in any way possible. He camped him out on the hills unknown to himself, and set Hope Palma and Anna Roskova to nurse him through the crisis.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW THE NEWS CAME THAT DREW THEM TOGETHER

HOPE delayed makes the heart sick, but it does not kill. And the sick heart craves human sympathy as the storm-beaten flower craves the sun. And when the sun shines the flower turns towards it and is grateful.

As the weeks and months passed and brought no further news of Serge, Hope's expectation began to weaken, and at last to die.

"Surely," she said to herself, "if he were alive he would have managed to send the promised word to Paul in some way. Mikhail Barenin's news must be true."

Pavlof, in rigid honour, suggested the possibility of the word having been duly sent and having been arrested on the way.

Pressed to the wall by her questionings, however, he had to acknowledge that the prearranged message would have come in such a form that the most

vindictive or hyper-sensitive censor could not possibly have read into it any but the most patently domestic intelligence.

Pressed still harder, he had to confess that, in spite of the hopes he so constantly impressed upon her, his own were growing weaker.

With a heavy heart he offered to do all in his power to further her wishes, whatever they might be, even to the point of helping her to leave Kara, but was forced, in discussion, to acknowledge it a useless risk and likely to lead to no result.

"You want to get rid of me," said she.

"I would count my life as nothing if it could help you," was his reply.

It may not be accounted very surprising that, under conditions so complex, Hope Palma's heart turned somewhat, and almost imperceptibly, towards this man into whose companionship she had been so strangely and so closely cast.

Her heart was sick. It had fed on hope till hope was bare as a bone and no longer afforded her starved soul any nourishment.

It was over two years since she saw her husband last. She was very human and she craved human sympathy. Where should she turn for it but to this man whose heart and hand were open to all, and

who alone could enter fully into her griefs and perplexities?

His unselfish devotion and ceaseless thought for others, his clean heart and high bearing, these things were daily under her eyes, and they wrought upon her as the soft rain and sunshine on the flower.

That he loved her still as passionately as ever she knew, in spite of all his cautiousness and frosty veilings. But she knew, too, that no word of love would ever pass his lips while the possibility of wrong to his friend might remain.

Is it strange that, as the blank months drew drearily past, her heart turned towards him? And did so with no more sense of unfaithfulness to her husband than a widowed heart may have, which aches for living love while yet not wholly forgetful of the dead.

By slow degrees hope sickened and died, and she came at last to believe in her heart that Mikhail Barenin's story must be true and that Serge was dead.

Pavlof, however, though he hungered body and soul for that still closer companionship with her which Circumstance, first handmaid of Providence, seemed to be doing her utmost to bring about, found strength and relief in the fierce fight in which he was engaged.

Hope, and his hopes concerning her, were never out of his thoughts, but the typhus kept him busy. Death no longer crept insidiously, but stalked boldly, and snatched his victims where he would, and Pavlof, beaten here and beaten there and losing everywhere, still faced him valiantly and would not leave the field.

It was about midsummer—when the fever was at its worst, and the kameras were like pest-houses, and his very soul was sick of the losing fight, though no sign of it showed in his face or body—that further news reached him concerning Serge Palma, and left him little room to doubt that his friend was dead.

Among the new arrivals one day was a man suffering from a gunshot wound in the thigh. It was not of recent date, but had broken out afresh through forced marching before the first healing was thoroughly accomplished.

Paul had him placed in hospital, and patched him up again, and gave instructions that he was not to move till the wound was perfectly healed. The man had bumped from Irkutsk in a springless téléga, and the hospital bed, poor as it was, was heaven to his bruised bones and torn flesh.

His name was Felix Ostrog. He was of the people, a bright, intelligent fellow who had im-

bibed evolutionary doctrines and done his small best to spread them. Hence—Kara.

It was in questioning him about his wound that Pavlof lighted on the news that cleared his path.

"It was thus, barin," said Ostrog. "There was in my artel in the convoy a man named Pavlof—"

"Ah!" said Paul, with a sudden accession of interest. "What was his first name?"

"Paul, barin, Paul Pavlof."

"I knew a Paul Pavlof. What was he like?"

"A bold fellow, with yellow hair and beard and blue eyes, a brave man and fearless as the devil."

"Yes, yes, get on!"

"We were in the hills by Karnsk. There are thick woods there, you know. Pavlof had been restless all along, and I knew he would make a break when the chance offered. It is no good one man bolting, you know. That gives one no chance. We talked as we walked, Pavlof and I and the others, and it was arranged that when he gave the signal a dozen of us would try the trick in different directions. Out of the lot there would be a chance for one or two, and the rest must pay the piper. The time came. We were in thick woods and we scattered like rabbits. It was shouts and shots, and screams from the women, and then I was lying in the brush with this hole in me. They found me

soon enough. I had not got twenty yards away. And one by one they dragged the others in, all but two, who got clear—”

“And Pavlof was one of them?” asked Paul, in a fever.

“No, barin, Pavlof lay alongside me with a bullet through his head, and he was dead. It was a pity, for he was a fine-looking man—”

“You are sure he was dead?”

“Quite sure, barin, for he lay next to me, and they left him there when they threw me into the teléga and formed up and moved on. Oh, yes; he was dead, or they would not have left him there. And I saw the hole through his head. No man could live with a hole like that in his head.”

“So!” said Paul, very thoughtfully. “Now you must lie quite still till you heal up.”

“I could lie quite still for ever, barin.”

That night, as Paul went up the hill to see his patient in the tent, his pulse was racing, and not with typhus.

Captain Sokolof was off his head and maundering fitfully of things and scenes that did not redound over much to his credit.

Hope and Madame Roskova were sitting outside the tent to escape as much as possible these unconscious revelations, and when Pavlof had visited his

patient, and given his nurses fresh instructions, and promised them an orderly in case he got too much for them, he asked Hope to walk back with him down the hill.

She looked at him with quick expectation, and as soon as they were out of hearing, asked breathlessly, "Some news?"

"Yes, news, and I think definite and final," and he briefly told her what he had learnt from Ostrog.

She walked silently by his side, and finally said, very quietly—

"I am glad you have told me. Anything is better than that terrible suspense. Poor Serge! Yes, he is dead—"

They spoke little to one another that night, and presently she turned and went up the hill again, and he went back to his work.

But now his thoughts were unchained. If Serge were indeed dead, and there seemed no reasonable doubt of it, there was no earthly reason why they should not come together, no reason why the long fiction of their wedded state should not become fact at last. And he went about among his sick with a new light in his face, and a spark in his dark eyes that gave the sick men more hope of themselves and their prospects.

During the next few days he met Hope at least twice a day, but they hardly spoke, and then only in the presence of others. But Paul felt his heart going like a drum each time he climbed the hill, at thought of seeing her, and to his eyes she was changed. She was no longer an impossible Hope, but had suddenly become possible, and his thoughts and his pulses raced to meet her.

On the fourth night after he had told her Ostrog's news, he found it necessary to go to his house for a book he had promised to one of his few convalescents.

There was a light in the window. It might be only the police having a rake round in his absence, though that was not very likely, since discipline was much relaxed and he himself almost exempt from supervision.

It might be Hope come down on some errand similar to his own. He quickened his step to the quickening of his heart, turned the handle, and stood face to face with her.

For a moment they stood and looked at one another in a silence that was full of voices, heart calling to heart till there was no sound in all the world for them but the sound of it. The fires long pent up within him blazed out at last. He could no longer have checked them if he would. He

would not if he could. His starved heart had burst the bonds so rigorously imposed upon it through all these weary months. The wall of partition was down and nothing stood between them.

The fire in his eyes evoked a responsive glow in hers. He threw out his arms towards her and strode over the dead past.

"Hope! Hope! My beloved! You must come to me. My heart is breaking for you," and he wound his arms about her, and strained her to him, and covered her face with hot kisses.

"At last! At last!" he panted. "My God! it has been hard to wait. And you—?" he flamed, fierce with the tumult that was in him. Had any intervened between them at that moment he would have rent him in pieces.

For answer she wound her arms round his neck and strained herself still closer to him, panting little sobs of joy and sorrow and pity, and then lay still in his arms with a restful sigh.

"God be thanked!" he said, in a voice so deep with emotion that it thrilled her as she lay against his leaping heart and knew that it was all for her.

He slipped back the hood of her cloak and stroked her hair, and kissed it and her eyes, again

and again, and yet again and again, as though he would never cease.

"My cup is full. I have nothing left to ask for. Kara is heaven."

"Paul," she said, drawing his head down towards her. "You are sure, quite sure—"

He stopped her with kisses till she held him away.

"Sure we are justified?" she jerked out, between her efforts to stay him.

"My heart says so, dearest. It has hungered and waited all these months. It would have waited still had there been any need."

He turned the lamp to a glow-worm glimmer, and they sat long in the darkness, with no more than a whispered word between them now and again. It was enough that the barrier was down and they were together.

"My heart was dying of starvation," Hope murmured one time, "and you were so cold, so cold."

"Ah, you know why," he said. "The fire was so fierce that I had to cloak it with ice."

"And poor Anna!" said Hope again. "She looked upon me as the last strange product of civilisation, and no wonder."

"Yes, it exercised her greatly, but we will trouble her no more."

She was silent for a time. Then she said softly, "You will wait still awhile, Paul?"

"I will wait your time, dearest. The knowledge that I have your love makes a new man of me. All the rest can wait."

Then at last he took her up the hill again, and parted from her in the darkness before they reached the tent. And so, back to his patients, with a spring in his step and that light in his face which was like a breath of new life in the pungent wards.

Thanks to Pavlof's unremitting attentions, and the careful nursing of Hope and Madame Roskova, Captain Sokolof came slowly out of the shadows on the hillside and knew to whom he owed his life. His prison kameras were cleaner and emptier than he had ever known them, when at last he was able to resume his duties. But the fact that he still lived, where so many had died, was never absent from him.

He said little. Talking was not his strong point. But he never forgot, and he took his own way of showing what was in him.

Colonel Zazarin had escaped the infection. He believed that a Governor's first duty was to keep himself in condition to govern, even though he did it by proxy. He kept aloof from the prisons, therefore, and allowed no man near him whose duties

took him into them. And so, for that time, he went free. But, since over-anxiety for life is not the best safeguard against disease, so in due course Colonel Zazarin fell into another pit in spite of all his precautions.

All through the lingering summer months the unequal fight in the prisons went on, a losing fight, incessant, heart-breaking. But for the inspiration of his new relations with Hope there were times when Paul would have cast himself down, sick to death of it all, and careless whether he ever got up again. But the thought of her, of her greater need than ever now of his help and comforting, of the still closer union that time would bring—these things braced him back to life. His heart was glad and his body responded to it, and brought him unscathed through the fiery furnace, though he spared himself no whit.

It was not till the first snows came that the virulence of the plague began to slacken, and it was a month longer before Paul felt himself at liberty to occupy his own house again.

Hope had been there for some weeks past with Madame Roskova to keep her company. But the moment Madame heard of Paul's coming she signified her intention of returning to Marya Verskaïa up the valley.

"And, my dear," she said, with impressive kindness to Hope, "I do hope you will be happier together than you were, and will live together as God meant you to do when He joined your lives."

And this time Hope did not ask her to stop.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW HOPE IMPOSED HER WILL UPON HIM

AS Paul sat before the stove and watched Hope prepare his supper, that first night of his return, his whole being ached for her.

But it was so much to have her love, and to have her there, that he would ask no more till—till he could wait no longer.

After supper she flitted to and fro on her household duties like a bird in its tiny cage, and there seemed no end to the things she had to do, though what might be the necessity for them all he could not tell, nor could she have told if he had asked her.

He sat quietly smoking for a time and watched her through the smoke. Then he laid aside his pipe and caught her as she passed one time, and drew her to his knee, and she felt the strong arm round her waist throbbing furiously.

She had been vaguely nervous of she knew not what, and had been making work to postpone its

coming. But she knew, as she lay in his arms and looked up into the restrained eagerness of his face and the lovelight in his dark eyes, that she was queen, and that her slightest wish would be his law.

And as she lay there, and the tension of her nerves slackened, she laughed softly to herself, and he looked at her in surprise.

"What are you laughing at? My foolishness? I count it wisdom."

"It was at my own," she said. "I was a little bit afraid of you, Paul."

"That you shall never be. I am yours to command as long as life lasts. Whatever you wish shall be."

She lay silent again in his arms and then said softly—

"We will wait one month more—and then—"

"Then?"

"Then—" and she drew down his head and kissed him warmly on the lips.

CHAPTER XX

HOW THE TIME CAME TO AN END

THIRTY little days to the crowning of their lives. Since Hope last saw her husband a thousand long days had passed, wearily and full of sorrows. Since Paul last saw his friend, two-thirds as many. And the only news they had had of him in all that time had been reports of his death. Yet, to both of them, these thirty days seemed freighted with all possibilities.

It was no mere whim or wish to feel her power which had dictated Hope's decision to wait this one month more.

She believed they had waited long enough. In her heart she had not a doubt that Serge was dead. But, with a desire to act with the most scrupulous fairness to his memory, she would give Providence this final chance of intervention, if that was to be. Her conscience was perfectly clean in the matter, and happiness was within her reach. Yet, with a

womanly instinct against over-haste in such a case; with a womanly abnegation of herself where her own happiness depended on her own out-reaching for it; and, perhaps, unconsciously to some extent, as a final justification of herself should such ever be needed, she deliberately imposed the bar of her will upon him for those thirty days and watched their passage with very mingled feelings.

As for Paul, he was happier than he had ever believed it possible for mortal man to be. So very happy was he that momentary fears of the reality of it all would flit across his heart.

Could it be possible that Fate would trick them in those thirty days and dash the full cup from their thirsty lips?

Yet surely they were justified in the step they were about to take. They had waited and hoped—yes, hoped, he for her sake, and she for Serge's—till hope had died of sheer starvation. Now that a new cup of happiness was held out to them, should they not drink it? And yet, being no more than mortal man, he could not wholly still his fears. For when the cup is filled to running over, filled so full that heaven shines through the brimming rim and rings it with a crown of light, man, being at best but of limited faith, must, always and inevitably,

fear lest the instability of all things earthly should spill it ere he drink.

He believed they were justified, and in those final days of waiting he drank deep of her love, deep draughts of pure delight which never could be taken from him, come what might.

His thoughts overleaped the days to the last one of all—and the one beyond it. And he thought deeply, for the circumstances in which they were placed were very extraordinary, and his whole desire was for the smoothing of Hope's path into this new sweet life.

In the eyes of the law, and of the circumscribed world in which their lives were cast, they were already husband and wife.

In the sight of God, and in the firm belief that Serge Palma was dead, they knew of no adequate reason why they should not become in reality that which they outwardly seemed to be.

And again, in the sight of the law of the land, Hope was free to marry whom she would, since exile is legal death and death breaks all legal ties, though he knew she would never dream of marrying if the faintest hope remained to her of Serge's being alive.

Since no priest was available, and no formal ceremony was possible, they must marry themselves;

and if ever they reached a land of freedom they would, for the satisfaction of the proprieties, go through any such ceremony as the law of that land might require to legalise their union there.

And so those thirty days passed slowly, swiftly. Slowly, to the thoughts that would outrun them. Swiftly, for the happiness that was compressed into them.

Each thought each had known the other, yet no day passed without its new revelation. They looked at one another with new eyes and each found the other changing day by day.

Paul found new beauties of winsomeness in Hope each time he looked at her, for the outward reflects the inward and her soul was at the Spring, and in truth all she had gone through had fined her like gold in the fire.

And to Hope, her lover's passionate devotion and high self-control brought a depth of loving trustfulness which would have led her to his bidding whatever it had been.

Their perfect faith in one another grew with the days. Their love expanded like a glorious flower when the winter of discontent is passed, and the quickening rains and sunshine of the spring have worked in it, and the summer of delight is come.

Their tiny rough house of logs and clay became a very shrine of loveliness. Its half-opaque windows were diamonds, its furnishings of cedar-wood, its commonest utensils rarest china and purest gold. For love transforms the world.

At times when he was away—for there was still much work for him in the prison and the hospital—she would turn out her scanty stock of clothing and set to work on it with the true womanly instinct for adornment. And many times she laughed at herself and her futile attempts at turning old things into new, for fashions at Kara ran to warmth and comfort and knew no other considerations.

But to him she was robed like a princess and her beauty increased with the hours. When he was away from her he hungered to be back. When she placed his supper on the board he would bend and kiss the fingers that held the plate, and throw an arm round her and draw her close, and kiss her waist, her arm, anything that was part of Hope Ivanovna.

For his heart had starved valiantly and without complaint for years, and now the time of plenty had arrived.

How nervous and excited she was that last day of the thirty! With what passionate worship he had kissed her in the morning before he left her.

And then he had come back and caught her to him again, and strained her close, and closer still. And then he flung up his arms and cried, "Ah God! Ah God!" and went quickly.

And she could do no work that day, but fluttered restlessly about the house, and stood and looked at the driving snow, and made futile attempts at further cleaning up of the diamonds and the cedar-wood and the gold, which were already polished beyond the polishing of ordinary human hands.

And so the day passed somehow, but how she hardly knew. She had no desire for ordinary human food, and yet she ate, and prepared for him a meal beyond the wont.

And when at last he came in, later than usual and smothered in snow, his face was all aglow, with the whipping of the wind maybe, and the diamond windows hid their sparkles at sight of his eyes.

He was quieter than usual while he ate that night, and it is possible that if he had been asked, five minutes later, on what he had fared, he would not have known, for he was thinking of greater things.

Out of a full heart the mouth speaketh, but there are times when the heart is overfull for speech.

When life is at its starry point speech is a desecration, and so they sat before the stove in silence and gazed into its glowing heart, while the minutes ran out and each one brought the new life nearer.

He drew her hand between his two hands, and felt the full tide of her love pulsing through it as she felt his.

A solemn sense of expectation was on them. The vague unrest was gone. The happy riot of their love-making was stilled. Their time had come. The past lay a-dying, and the new life lay cradled within the hour.

The very depth of their gladness filled them with a sense of awe. It was in no light humour that these two came together.

As the little German clock on the shelf told midnight, Paul stood up, and she stood facing him on the instant, as though they two were indeed already one, as though one thought and one heart already moved them both.

"Dearest!" he said, in those deep tones that came right from his heart and set her own heart thrilling in response. "The time we have waited for is come. I do not ask if your heart is changed. I know it is not."

Her eyes were like stars as he looked deep into

them, and found there nothing but pure love and steadfast faith.

"You trust me, Hope Ivanovna?"

"With my life."

"We have no priest. We can have no witnesses. What we do is in the sight of God alone."

"I am content."

"Kneel with me, dearest."

And they knelt by a chair—a chair that had been made by a carpenter who had murdered his wife, and so had been sent to build up the empire in the East. But it was a well-made chair in spite of its origin, and for these two it became a solemn altar.

They had no candles, no crowns, no carpet, no incense, no choir. Nothing but the convict's chair and the rough wood floor, and their two selves, and God. But the chair was clean, and the floor was clean, and their hearts were clean.

They knelt in silence for a time, such time as the priest, had he been there, would have been praying over them. And the little German clock on the shelf cried "Quick! Quick! Quick! Quick!" as though he feared that something might step in between them even now.

But nothing was abroad that night. The wind howled round the corners of the house, and rumbled in the clay chimney. It piled the snow high against

the windward side, and snapped the long icicles that hung to the ground on the other side. But inside there was a great silence.

Then Paul took her right hand in his and said, in the voice that came from his heart, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I, Paul Ivanuitch Pavlof, take thee, Hope Ivanovna Arskaïa"—she noticed it—"to be my lawful wedded wife. Before Almighty God I swear to honour and serve thee, body and soul, and to defend thee against the world so long as life is left to me."

And she, sweetly and firmly, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I, Hope Ivanovna Arskaïa, take thee, Paul Ivanuitch Pavlof, to be my lawful wedded husband. Before Almighty God I pledge myself to honour and serve thee, body and soul, so long as life is left to me."

"Amen!" he said solemnly, and she "Amen!"

They remained kneeling for a time, such time as the priest, had he been there, would have been invoking many strange blessings on their union.

Then, still kneeling, they kissed as they had never kissed before.

He raised her gallantly, and stood, and looked deep into her eyes again, and now they swam like stars in the sea, steadfast stars in a calm, deep sea.

"My dearest, my wife, you shall never regret this that we have done," he said.

"I shall never regret it."

He lifted her suddenly in his strong arms and carried her into the inner room.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THEIR CUP BRIMMED FULL

WINTER was always a bitter time at Kara, a time of much hardship and suffering to the ill-found and ill-fed prisoners, and to the members of the Free Command a time of pinching struggle to make both ends meet. But it was also an opportunity for much self-sacrificing generosity and the sharing of little with those who had less. For the Government allowance of twelve shillings a month did not go far, when firing and lighting were added to the already heavy burden of food and clothing; and the means of outside increment, few at best, were almost eliminated by the absurd restrictions of the law.

Of course there were occasional remittances from home, some of which reached their destinations, and were valued at many times their intrinsic worth because of the remembrances they brought; but many of which never arrived at all and wasted

themselves on objects very different from those intended by the senders.

It was a time of mutual help all round. And if all outside was cold black and white, inside was much rosy cheer and much good fellowship, when the members of the community met at this house or that, to save fires and lights for the rest.

But that winter was long remembered above all previous winters for the delightful hospitality of the Palma cottage.

Serge Petrovitch had always been helpful and freehanded. That winter his and his wife's generosity knew no bounds. The little house was open to all, and scarcely a night in the week but its windows gleamed like hospitable jewels, while all around was wintry desolation of ice and snow, and above, a sky as grim as a curse.

The glowing heart of the rough clay stove never once died out the winter through, and the hearts of its owners were warm to all the world.

They were completely and absolutely happy. The brimming cup had reached their lips unspilled, and the deeper they drank of it the more there was in it. It overflowed on all around and carried new strength to the weary and uplifting for all.

And Anna Roskova especially rejoiced and took credit to herself, for she was convinced that it was

her outspoken reasoning with Hope that had removed the unbelievable estrangement between these two. And when she nodded knowingly to her hostess, and sometimes quietly rallied her on the subject, Hope would smilingly acknowledge, what all the world could see, that she was as happy as the day and night were long.

For a time the police, as was their custom, used to intrude upon them now and again to see what mischief was afoot. But finding nothing but cheerful, unconspiring faces and much merry talk, and always the proffer of a cup of hot tea, their visits ceased. Not but that they would have liked to continue them for sake of the material benefits, for cheerful faces and merry talk were none too common at Kara. But, though the sheep may perforce receive the sheepdogs with politeness, they can never mingle on friendly terms. Many a Cossack guard looked enviously at the glowing windows of the Palma house that winter, and wished himself a political prisoner so that he might be inside.

Captain Sokolof maintained very friendly relations with them, and that was beneficial in many ways. It lightened the surveillance of his inferiors, and, since he insisted on Paul's acceptance of the official salary for his medical work, it placed them

in a position of affluence compared with their neighbours, and their neighbours reaped the benefit.

Sokolof never forgot that he owed his life to these two. More than once he hinted that he was working in their behalf, though he did not specify how, and he constantly and openly expressed to them his disgust at the neglect his communications suffered at the hands of his superiors at St. Petersburg.

"Now if I had my way," he said once, "I would have every official of the Ministry serve a term in Siberia, so that they should know how things really are. They would learn a great deal that it would do them good to know. They have their pleasures and their functions and their pressing matters close at hand, and Kara is very far away, and Kara can wait."

Colonel Zazarin troubled them little. He was not their immediate official head, and only came in contact with them by a descent from his pedestal. They had shown him as plainly as they dared, when he did call upon them, that he was not wanted, and by degrees his visits fell off. Then, too, he had had a great scare with the typhus, and he still deemed it good for his health to keep aloof from prisons and prisoners as much as he possibly could.

So all through that winter the heart of the stove glowed warmly, and the samovar was always on the boil. And Hope Pavlova baked incessantly, and was busy and happy from morning till night, but happiest at night when her little house was packed like a biscuit-box with less-favoured folk, whose faces smiled at sight of her in spite of all their woes.

So radiant was she then that they wondered at her new rich beauty, and discussed among themselves what had come to her. And over their tea and cakes, to which some of them had been looking forward with keen anticipation all through the long cold day, they talked and talked—these victims of great ideas, and very harmless victims, most of them—and sometimes they laughed and sometimes even sang.

A smaller sphere could hardly have been found, nor a narrower, nor a gloomier. But these two, by the wealth of love that was in their own hearts, and by the beauty of life that had come to them through their love, touched all these smaller lives with the gladness of hope, and strengthened them for the sorrows they had to bear.

It was in those long winter days and nights that Hope undertook to introduce her husband to the peculiarities and beauties of the English language,

which she herself, as her mother's daughter, spoke with ease and fluency. He was an apt pupil, and made rapid progress, and many a hearty laugh rose over their lessons and his first barbarous attempts at pronunciation. That was how, thanks to her stringent drilling, he came, in later days, to speak English like an educated Scotchman, an accomplishment which any man may be proud of, and which stood him in good stead when the time came.

Yes, winter at Kara is a hard and bitter time at best, and for some a time of dull anguish and black despair. To such, as far as they could get at them, Hope and Pavlof became minor providences, where the major came like to be forgotten or abjured through utter hopelessness and misery.

They cheered, and comforted, and fed starved souls and bodies alike, and shared to the full their own overflowing happiness with those who had none, and felt the richer for all they gave.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW THE CUP SPILLED

SO the winter waxed and waned, and the skies began to brighten to the spring. The snows disappeared, except on the hills, the roads were knee-deep tracts of mud, and Colonel Zazarin, having escaped the typhus, was down with typhoid, and was a very sick man.

Pavlof prevailed on Hope and Madame Roskova to take charge of him, since nothing but the most careful nursing could save his life. They both detested the man, Hope for sufficient reason, and Anna by instinct, but neither was the woman to leave even an enemy in extremity.

Pavlof had laboured mightily all through the winter on such necessary sanitary improvements as might check, to some extent, the recurrence of the fever when the warmer weather came. And Sokolof, in the light of the previous year's experiences, did what he could to help him. He could give him

free labour to any extent almost, but had received neither money nor encouragement from headquarters in answer to his applications, and so Pavlof's improvements must necessarily be of a homely character. But they were such crying evils that he had to fight, the appeal they made to the senses was so vital, that a blind man could have discovered them and known by his nose what needed to be done.

It was a busy, happy time for him, and he asked no more, for himself, than that the authorities at St. Petersburg should continue their neglect of Kara and leave him in possession of the field.

But one afternoon there came rattling up from Ust Kara a strange lieutenant of gendarmes, attended by two armed orderlies, and evidently in a hurry. He inquired for Captain Sokolof's quarters and descended from his *teléga* there with an air of relief and much stretching of the legs.

A quarter of an hour later Sokolof's orderly was hunting through the settlement for "Serge Palma," with instructions to attend him to his own house.

Thither came to him presently Captain Sokolof himself in great perturbation of mind. Paul, in fact, had never seen the hard face so moved.

"Palma," said the captain, "I bring you ill news. I tried to do you a kindness and this is the result. They have sent orders to move you on to Yakutsk.

It is damnable. I told them of all your good work here, and this is their answer," and he delivered himself volcanically of his feelings on the matter, while Paul braced up under the blow.

"When?" was all that he asked at last.

"At once. I am to deliver you to this man, and his instructions are to carry you without delay to Yakutsk," and the hard face was all twisted between indignation and pity.

"What must be, must," said Paul philosophically. "The Governor will probably die, but I suppose we can't help that. What about my wife? Is it province or town?"

"Province. It is an awful life for a woman. But she has the right to go with you if she will. I shall do all I can to get the order reversed. Perhaps Madame would wait—"

"I will see her at once. Can we have till tomorrow morning?"

"I will arrange that. It is damnable. Let me know if Madame decides to go and I will procure her a conveyance. There is Zazarin's tarantas. He will probably never need it again. Oh, it is damnable!" and Sokolof cursed his way back to his own quarters, while Pavlof sat with his head in his hands and tried to look this last blow of fate squarely in the face.

For life among the outer barbarians of the Yakut uluses, ignorant even of the most elementary decencies of life, cut off absolutely from civilisation, is life at its very lowest and its very worst.

How could he ask Hope to accompany him to such a place? How dissuade her from going? Nay, he knew beforehand that she would go. And, sitting there in utterest misery, he forecasted the marring and degrading of her bright young life and the breaking of their newborn happiness.

But there was little time for sitting still. Hope must be told and at once, and he went off heavily to Colonel Zazarin's house.

He paid a somewhat perfunctory visit to his patient and beckoned Hope out of the room. She had seen the trouble in his face and followed him anxiously.

"What is it?" she asked, with a hand on his arm.

"Bad news, dearest. The worst possible news," —at the moment he could conceive no worse. "A special messenger has arrived from St. Petersburg. I am ordered to Yakutsk."

"Yakutsk!" she gasped, for she knew all that it implied.

"Sokolof is beside himself. He has been endeavouring to better our condition. He looks on this as their answer. It is grievous treatment, but

there is nothing for it but to submit. But, Hope, it is possible it may be only for a time. Sokolof, I know, will do his utmost in the matter. For yourself, dearest—”

“Where you go, I go,” she broke in hastily.

“But Hope—Yakutsk!”

“I know, I know. But we will not be separated.”

“God help us!” he said. “I dare not think of you there.”

“And I dare not think of myself anywhere but there, Paul. No, we will go together. When is it?”

“To-morrow.”

“To-morrow! Then we have no time to lose. I will go at once and get things ready.”

“And I must go and tell Sokolof that you decide to go.”

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW ONE CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD

CAPTAIN SOKOLOF'S orderly never for one moment thought of standing on ceremony with the doctor, who was in and out of the very prison all day long. He showed him at once to the room where the captain was entertaining his guest.

Pavlof crossed the threshold and stood numb and dazed. His eyes blinked at the newcomer in a stare of petrified horror. Then they wrenched themselves away and fixed hypnotically on Sokolof, who gazed back at him with pity.

Sokolof thought he understood. He knew what Yakutsk meant. He knew that few survived it, and that most would prefer death to trying it, and that for a woman it was impossible.

"She will not go?" said the captain commiseratingly. "And yet, I don't know but what she is right. It is no place for a woman. And perhaps she will change her mind."

But Pavlof did not speak, did nothing but stare at him as if he were a ghost.

"Take heart, Palma," he growled, in the nearest approach to kindness which twenty years in the *gendarmerie* had left him. "Take heart. I will not rest till this matter is righted. It is too damnable. There is some mistake. This is Lieutenant Vinsky, who brings the bad news."

But there was more here than Captain Sokolof remotely dreamed of.

Paul had put up his hand to the doorpost for support. His head was spinning. The two men at the table and the lights in the room began to swim slowly round and round. The doorpost began to reel on its own account and tried to slip out of his fingers.

For the man who sat there hobnobbing with Sokolof—trim, official, booted and belted, perfectly satisfied with himself and his surroundings—was Serge Palma in the flesh, and his bold blue eye had winked encouragingly and admonishingly at Paul the moment he entered the room.

"Vodka," said Sokolof, and sprang up and slid a chair under Pavlof, and hastened to bring him brandy in a glass. "It has been too much for him. Damn those—um—" for it is not always wise to

express one's feelings concerning one's superiors, even though the grounds be ample.

"I am with you, Captain," said Palma heartily. "Petersburg lacks heart, and the Ministry of the Interior is destitute of the most elementary bowels of compassion. If they had to carry out their own instructions they would learn many things they are ignorant of."

"It is true," growled Sokolof, but said no more. Even people who agreed with you in their hearts sometimes made the most of one's indiscretions, and reported them behind one's back to one's undoing.

"So, Mr. Palma," said Serge, the instant he saw Paul pulling himself together, "Madame is not inclined for Yakutsk?"

Paul shook his head vaguely, without looking at him. His brain was in a tangle, but, slowly and confusedly, it was beginning to work again and to piece things together.

"It is truly a terrible place for any civilised being to go to," said Serge. "And one cannot be surprised at Madame's hesitation. It is natural. But, after all, a wife's place is by her husband's side. Perhaps, as Captain Sokolof says, she may change her mind before morning. It would be better for her to change it now than when we are gone. It is

a bad journey at best, but we would do all in our power to smooth it for her. I think you should talk with her again on the subject, Mr. Palma."

"Yes," nodded Pavlof, understanding dimly what was expected of him, "I will talk with her again."

"And what, in Heaven's name, are we to do here without you?" said Sokolof.

"You must get out a doctor before the summer comes," said Paul dully.

"Da! Must! That is all very well, but we are dependent on those—"

"Fools," suggested Serge heartily.

"Well, those gentlemen who sit in comfort in St. Petersburg, and whose thoughts don't carry as far as Kara."

"I will go," said Paul, getting up. "I will go—and speak with her again," and he went out, feeling like one who had fallen on his head and is going home to tell of the accident.

The thought of Yakutsk was horrifying to Hope. But Paul would be with her and that would make up for much. He had made Kara a heaven for her. Well, they would carry their heaven with them wherever they went,—ay, even to Yakutsk. And perhaps it might be only for a time, and then they would be allowed to come back to Kara.

What happiness the rough little house had held for them! She would have liked to take that chair with her—that chair at which they had knelt the other night. Perhaps Captain Sokolof would let her have it. She would get Paul to ask him.

It was hard to decide what else to take and what to leave, for if they took everything they had they would still be bare at Yakutsk, and in a thousand mile journey by téléga there was little room for superfluous baggage. Still, she would have that chair, whatever she had to leave behind.

She flitted busily to and fro, arranging and folding and tying into bundles.

She would put a bold face on matters and bear herself bravely, for she knew his fears were all for her. She would show him that he need not fear. The only thing on earth she feared was losing him. Side by side with him she could stand anything, even Yakutsk.

With such thoughts working in her, the face she turned on Pavlof when he opened the door was to him as the face of an angel. So high a courage, so much of tenderness, so much of love were in it. He never forgot it.

"Paul, my dear—" she began, and broke off short at sight of his ghastly face.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried, in new distress and terror, as he sank heavily on a seat.

"Listen, Hope," he said quietly, but his voice was as strained and unnatural as his face. "I have other news for you—terrible news—"

"Ah!" She jumped to it with womanly instinct. He knew it by the sudden pallor of her face.

"Serge—is alive and well."

"My God!" she gasped, and her hands fluttered gropingly, as though they sought something tangible to hold on to.

"He is here, Hope," and he caught the wandering hands and held them.

"Here? Oh, Paul! Paul!" and her hands gripped his convulsively, and the sudden tumult of her heart fined her voice to a terrified whisper.

"Dearest," he said, "we did what seemed right and our hearts are clean. A higher than Serge must judge us."

It was the right note, and it quieted her. But they sat long in silence and gazed desperately into the future, and it was full of shadows.

"We must be very cautious, Hope—for his sake," he said at last. "His life hangs by a thread. A word, a sign, and he is lost. It is he who has brought the order to transport me to Yakutsk."

"Serge?—Paul, what are you saying?" And she gazed at him with a new fear in her eyes.

"No," he said, with a rough, quick shake of the head, "I am not crazy. It is as I tell you. He has come here at the risk of his life to get me out of the toils. The order he brings is, doubtless, forged. The uniform he wears without a right. It is bravely done—"

He tried his best to instil life and warmth into his words, but they would not come to his bidding. They were only words.

"But—" she said dazedly—"Yakutsk?"

"Do you not see? That is only a blind like all the rest. Once clear of Kara we go where we will."

"You have spoken with him?"

"Only before Captain Sokolof. But I understand it all. Serge is Lieutenant Vinsky. I went to tell Sokolof that you would go with me."

"Oh, Paul! How can we go?" she gasped.

"We must, Hope. There is nothing else to be done. Serge's life is at stake."

"Oh, why—why did he not come sooner—if he had to come? It is terrible his coming now."

"Yes, it is terrible his coming now. It is God's will, dearest, and our hearts are void of offence. We must think now of Serge. It will try you hard in the morning, Hope."

"I will be careful," she said, eyeing him breathlessly still, with wide, amazed eyes,—“But you will come too, Paul? We all go together?”

“I must go. It is for me he came.”

“Does he not know I am here?” she gasped.

“I cannot tell what he knows.—But—yes—he must understand. He knows I am Serge Palma here. He knows Madame Palma is here. He must have reasoned it all out.—Yes—I remember.—It was he who suggested that Madame might change her mind—”

“Change her mind?”

“And decide to go. Captain Sokolof did not believe you would face it.”

“He never had a wife.”

“I must try to speak with Serge,” he said. “I must tell him. It will be terrible—”

“Tell him how we waited, Paul. How we waited, and hoped, and despaired. And how we heard twice of his death—”

“I will tell him all. It will be sore telling, Hope, and sore hearing.”

“Our hearts are clean, Paul.”

“God bless you, dearest, and forgive me for bringing this trouble on you.”

“Not so,” she said quickly. “I share the blame, if blame there is. Have I not shared the joy of it?”

"God keep you, my dear heart," and he kissed her very lovingly and went out.

And she sat looking into the future—the near and the far, with woeful eyes and tightened lips.

He went straight to Sokolof's quarters, ostensibly to tell him that his wife would go on the morrow, but determined, if he could, to get speech alone with Serge.

And so he became witness of a curious scene between the captain and the pseudo-lieutenant, a scene which, in very different ways, was highly creditable to both. It bore eloquent testimony to Captain Sokolof's good feeling. It spoke worlds for Palma's self-command.

The captain and his visitor had got on exceedingly well together, since the latter endorsed to the full the former's exasperation at the treatment Kara received from St. Petersburg.

No matter what the immediate subject of discussion, Sokolof would constantly break out in bitter recurrence to his grievance.

When Paul was shown in to them, the matter of his translation was uppermost again, and in a very acute form.

"Ha, Doctor, we were speaking of you," said Sokolof. "I want Lieutenant Vinsky to allow you one day more, while I telegraph to headquarters

and beg them to reconsider the matter. It is out of all reason. They cannot surely have received my letters or they have not read them. It is inhuman. It is brutal."

"I am indebted to you, Captain," Paul made shift to answer, as all the disastrous possibilities of such a course crowded his brain. "You have done all you could for me. I would never forgive myself if you did yourself any disservice by trying to help me further."

"Exactly!" said Palma quietly. "That is the danger." He pursed his lips and shook his head dubiously. "Do you know why Simonofsky was removed from Barnaül, Captain Sokolof?"

"I can imagine, from the way you put it," said Sokolof, blowing out smoke viciously.

"Exactly. For alleged favouring of politicals. He has had no post since."

"I don't care a kopeck," said Sokolof stubbornly. "This is no ordinary case. Besides, we need him here to keep down the fever. That is reason enough."

"It is not for me to advise, Captain," said Palma, with another dubious shake. "You know who you are dealing with. Telegraph by all means, if you are willing to take the risk. As for me, I have only one thing to do, and that is to carry out my instruc-

tions to the letter, much as I may regret them," with a bow to Paul. "I have strained them somewhat, perhaps, already, but—well, we could hardly have started to-night, and besides, the unexpected question as to Madame arose. How is that matter decided, Mr. Palma?"

"Madame decides to go," said Paul.

"Bravo!" said the lieutenant. "I thought she would. Can't you procure a tarantas for her, Captain—just for the first stage or two? We shall strike the snow in the Yablonois and then it will be smooth going. But *teléga* travelling is the very devil, especially for a woman. My bones are aching yet."

"Zazarin has a tarantas," said Sokolof.

"He won't need it for some time to come," said Paul.

"If he ever needs it," said Sokolof. "All the same I shall telegraph at once, let them think and do what they please. Help me, Vinsky, to word it so that they will understand, the—"

"Blockheads," suggested Palma, with a smile. "I will help you with pleasure, Captain, only you understand, answer or no answer, I start at eight o'clock to-morrow morning for Yakutsk. What is the soonest you can get their reply?"

"If they answered at once we might hear during

the night. It all depends on things at the other end. The Minister might be away, and no one else would take the responsibility. But I will have an orderly waiting at this end so as to lose no time."

"Well, I can do this for you," said Palma. "We will travel easily and make no undue speed. If you receive a favourable reply after we have left, a messenger can catch us. For your sake, Mr. Palma, and for Madame's, we hope it may be so."

"That will do," said Sokolof. "Now—the telegram."

He hunted up an official form and began to write—

"To the Minister of the Interior. Concerning political prisoner Palma ordered to Yakutsk. Typhus raging here"—"that's straining a point, but it probably will be soon"—"Palma's services as doctor urgently needed—"

"Say that the Governor is at the point of death," suggested Palma.

"Good! That is stronger still," and he wrote in the addition, and continued, thinking it out word by word—"Beg your permission retain prisoner here for present. See my letters."

At which the lieutenant laughed out loud. "My dear Captain," he said, "those last words would lose you both your place and your request. His

Excellency is not accustomed to be addressed in so terse a fashion as that. His reply would probably be, 'Tell Captain Sokolof to go to the devil—or to Yakutsk,' which is pretty much the same thing. Level it up to his altitude, my dear sir, or worse will come of it. It might do for the office, but it won't do for the big man himself."

"It does read a bit brusque," said Sokolof, looking at the objectionable words. "What do you suggest?"

"You can't make it too flowery. I would suggest—'Crave your Excellency's gracious perusal of my letters concerning this prisoner.' When would your letters reach them, Captain?"

"Weeks ago, months ago. Before you left, certainly."

"Of course, I forgot. It is to those letters that you attribute their present action and my presence here."

"Yes," said Sokolof, looking sober. "I was forgetting that."

"Is it wise to refer to the letters at all, think you? Why not base your request solely on the ground of the typhus?"

Sokolof considered the point, tapping the pencil up and down between his teeth.

"That is," continued Palma, "if you are quite

decided on sending the telegram at all. It is doubtful if any good will come of it, and as far as you yourself are concerned it would undoubtedly be safer not to interfere."

"It shall go," said Sokolof obstinately. "They may break me if they like, but Palma saved my life and I do not forget."

He finished the telegram and gave it to his orderly to despatch at once, bidding him at the same time station a messenger at the office to bring him the answer without delay at whatever hour it might arrive.

Pavlof marvelled at Palma's careless ease in face of so imminent a danger. For, if Sokolof's telegram passed quickly through from point to point, and reached the Minister's hands, and was deemed worthy of prompt attention, discovery was unavoidable, and the results to Serge himself must be disastrous.

But he sat there smoking as coolly as if he had not a care in the world, and Paul came to believe that the forethought which had devised so bold a scheme must have provided also for such a contingency as this.

But Palma's calmness was simply the courage of a brave man who had calculated the chances in his favour. He had done all he could to improve them

by delaying the telegram. Now he awaited the result with, at all events, outward equanimity.

It was then ten o'clock at night. Taking into account the difference of time between Kara and St. Petersburg, it would probably be five or six in the evening before the telegram reached its destination. The chances were that the Minister would not be at his office—one chance to the good. Again the chances were that the telegram would take considerably longer in transmission from station to station over those 4,000 miles of desert—another chance to the good.

Even if it got to the Minister that night it was incredible that he should remember who Serge Palma was, without inquiry and the turning up of dossiers, all of which meant time and trouble. And why should the great man worry himself unduly over so very small an affair as the sending, or not sending, of a poor devil of a political to Yakutsk?—several chances to the good there.

If they troubled to investigate at all they would discover that some mistake had been made by some one. But mistakes—and very terrible mistakes—were constantly being made. If Serge Palma had been ordered to Yakutsk by some one, some one naturally must have had very good reason for so doing. Serge Palma would be as safe at Yakutsk

as at Kara, and it is an awkward thing to interfere with accomplished facts without very good grounds for doing so—a galaxy of chances to the good in all that.

And Serge's mind had flashed over them as the smoke curled lazily through his moustache, and he felt fairly safe. And so he sipped his vodka as quietly as if he had been in a Petersburg café without a care on his mind.

Pavlof's mind had been so jangled by the day's happenings that it was not working as sharply and clearly as usual. He would not have been in the least surprised if the orderly had walked in at any moment with a telegram from headquarters exploding the mine on which they sat. If he could have spoken privately to Serge he would have urged him to leave them to their fate and flee while yet there was time.

But he had no chance of speaking, since Sokolof never left his guest, and, finding the atmosphere too electrical for his tight-strung nerves, he begged the captain's permission to retire, on the plea of packing his belongings for the journey.

"At eight o'clock we start, Mr. Palma," said Serge.

"I will be here."

"And Madame?"

"And Madame."

"Unless she changes her mind again," said Sokolof. "It is about the only privilege we can offer her here, and, God knows, no one would blame her if she did."

"She will not change her mind," said Pavlof, and withdrew, and went wearily home again.

He felt utterly fagged out, body and soul, with the rending emotions of the day, and he knew there was no rest for him that night. Time enough to rest when he got to Yakutsk. From all accounts it was the only thing to be done there. Bah! he was forgetting. His brain was getting muddled with it all. It was not to Yakutsk they were going.

He wondered vaguely where Palma would make for. The Amur probably, and Vladivostok. But he would have it all arranged, and God grant them a good deliverance! For when they got clear of Kara their troubles would only be beginning. It was a desperate venture at best, but they must go through with it and trust in providence.

He felt, however, more like a prisoner bound for Yakutsk than a prisoner on the eve of enlargement, more of a bondman than he had ever felt since he came to Kara.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW THEY PREPARED TO GO WITH HIM

HOPE had been busy during his absence. Marya Verskaïa had come in, and between them they had packed Hope's belongings into bundles, and spread out all Paul's for his decision as to what he would take and what leave behind.

The kind-hearted little chatterbox was loud in her lamentations over their sudden departure, and her ceaseless flow of talk was to Paul like the continuous dropping of small shot on a bared membrane of the brain.

He hastily selected the most necessary things, constantly forgetting that it was not to Yakutsk that he was going, but to freedom, where all things were obtainable, or to death, where nothing would be needed.

The philosophical paucity of his requirements astonished Marya Verskaïa not a little.

"But Serge Petrovitch," she would urge, time

after time. "You will certainly need this at Yakutsk. There is nothing there, you know—absolutely nothing. You cannot possibly replace it."

"No, no. I shall not need it. I will do without it, Marya Stepanovna."

And—"His brain has given way," Marya would plaintively murmur.

"You will give that to Polokof, and this to Hugo Svendt, and this to Alexei Etelsky. I shall not require them, I assure you," as she held up remonstrative hands again. Anna Roskova will do as she thinks fit with all the rest. Now I will see you home, or the police will think you have run away," for he knew that Hope's nerves must be as tremulous as his own, and that Marya's chatter must be jangling them in similar fashion.

Hope was still busy about the house on quite unnecessary work when he got back. She could not sit still for a moment. Her great eyes glowed luminously in their dark circles, in spite of their drooping lids.

She turned them on him full of anxious questioning as he came in.

He shook his head despondently. "I had no chance of speaking to him. Sokolof never left us for a moment."

But he said nothing of that fateful telegram. The load she carried was heavy enough already. Her strained, white face wrung his heart. If the sacrifice of his own life could have smoothed her way he would have given it, willingly and instantly. But he knew that it could not. It was to him that she looked now, and he must live for her, to defend her against the whole world, as he had pledged himself when he married her.

"Marya was driving me crazy with her babble," Hope said wearily. "But I could not get her to go. You are quite sure it is Serge, Paul?"

"Quite sure, Hope."

"Has he suffered much?"

"He looks gay and gallant, though I have no doubt he is as anxious as we are."

"It is surely a very dangerous thing he is doing."

"He is risking life and liberty. But he is a brave man. We must do nothing to add to his risk."

"I will be very careful."

"Will you not try to sleep for an hour or two, Hope? There will be no rest when once we start."

"Sleep! I could as soon think of dying as of sleeping. Which way do we go?"

"Up into the Yablonois. Then as Serge may have decided. He has thought out his plans without doubt."

"I will get ready the breakfast," she said, starting up again.

"It is only twelve o'clock yet," he said, with a wan smile.

"Well, some tea, then. One must do something. Will you not try to sleep? You look worn out."

"I could not sleep either. We will have some tea."

So they sat sipping their tea and making pretence to eat, and Hope jumped up every second minute to do some little job which did not need doing, and Pavlof's teeth ground silently at times, as he thought of that telegram speeding over the steppes, and the possible reply speeding back for their destruction. But he said no word of it to Hope, and when he had got his pipe fairly under way, and the soothing of the tea began to make itself felt, his wits settled down somewhat, and matters began to look more hopeful, as they sometimes have a way of doing when they have touched bottom.

He reproached himself as an ingrate for the feelings that would come uppermost in his heart. He tried his very hardest to feel grateful to Serge for his gallant remembrance of him. But he was painfully conscious of a dull sense of regret, of injury

almost, at his having come back to life, and in so lively a fashion.

Far better if he had left them alone. But then he could not know that. He had gallantly done his best, and in return they were going to break his heart.

How would he take it? Hardly, hardly. How could it be otherwise? If only he could have had it all out with Serge before he and Hope met in the morning! But that had been impossible.

And it would be hard for Hope too. The sight of Serge's misery would be dreadful to her. The thought of it would darken her life.

But there was no escape from the coil. Explanations were impossible. Go they must, for Serge's life was at stake. But the thought of the explanations which must be made on the morrow hung upon him like a great black cloud.

Liberty was good, but the love and companionship of Hope Ivanovna were more to him than anything liberty could give him. With her he would have been content to spend the rest of his life at Kara. Content? Ay, happy beyond anything all the rest of the world could possibly hold for him. And now—their happy content must suffer shock and be strained through bitterness. It would survive the shock, if they themselves survived the dan-

gers of the road they were about to travel, but it would always bear the imprint of it.

And, not without bitterness, he recognised all the irony of the position. How Serge was repaying him in kind, and most exactly, for the service he had once rendered him. For Hope Ivanovna's sake he had undertaken Palma's burden, and so, all unconsciously, had been the means of separating her and Serge. And now Palma had come, at risk of his life, to set him free, and, all unconsciously, was threatening the new happiness which had come to Hope and himself. It was a strange turn of the wheel, and there was no escape from it. He strove to be grateful, but found it well nigh impossible.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW THEY STRUCK A FRIEND

PAVLOF'S heart was beating wild alarms as he led Hope to police headquarters a little before eight the following morning. What would they find there, and how would Hope come through the ordeal? Had any answer come from St. Petersburg? Was Serge even now under arrest and this wild chance of liberty gone? Verily he wished the chance had never offered.

One false step, a look too much, and Serge was ruined beyond redemption, and he pressed Hope's arm tight inside his own to brace her for the test.

But as soon as they turned in through the big gate of the stockade, the sight of Colonel Zazarin's three-horse tarantas and a téléga, at the door of Sokolof's quarters, set his mind at rest.

So far no discovery had been made and all was well. He arranged the bundles in the tarantas to make as comfortable a seat as could be managed for

Hope. He took her hand through his arm again for the crucial moment, and they stood waiting for Sokolof and Lieutenant Vinsky.

"Now," said Pavlof shortly, as they appeared in the doorway.

Hope shot one quick glance at Serge, and then her hand began to tremble violently on Paul's arm.

"Steady," he murmured, "it will be over in a minute," and Sokolof and Palma came towards them, saluting Madame as they came.

"So, Madame, you have decided to be courageous once more," said Sokolof.

She bowed, not daring to use her voice or raise her eyes.

"Well, that is as it should be. And be sure I shall do my utmost to shorten your trials."

"It is very good of you," she murmured.

"This is Lieutenant Vinsky." Hope bowed again. "He will provide for your comfort, as far as may be, on the journey, and you must remember that he is only carrying out his orders. Mr. Palma," he said, shaking hands with Pavlof, "I shall not forget what I owe to you, and I shall not rest till I get this abominable order annulled. Now, Vinsky is on tenterhooks to be gone. So—Adieu! Adieu, Madame!"

They settled Hope among her bundles in the tarantas, and Pavlof and the lieutenant disposed themselves as comfortably as circumstances would permit.

"If you get any reply to your telegram, Captain, you know our route," said Serge, leaning over the side.

"Do not fear. I shall send after you post haste if it is good news," said Sokolof.

Then the driver climbed to his seat, gathered up his reins, cracked his long lash over his horses' heads, shouted an encouraging "Noo-oo-oo!" and they started at a wild gallop for freedom.

The road was full of holes, and the holes were full of mud, and the mud from six madly spurning heels came flying past their heads, and Serge laughed gaily as he drew down the leather curtain in front. Then, with his face still lighted by a broad smile, and a blaze in his bold blue eyes, he turned to Hope, and took her hands in his and kissed them, gloves and all.

"Oh, Serge! Is it all real?" she cried, the words jerking out of her to the bumping of the tarantas, and she, all in a red heat of confusion, clinging tight to the side lest she should be thrown out of her seat. "Are you alive? Am I awake? Are we really going to freedom?"

"All those," he said, with a hearty laugh of enjoyment. "And you?—you had given me up?"

"Yes, we had given you up," she began, but came to a stop. For how was it possible to enter on explanations such as they had to make, when they were all three jumping in their places like marionettes, and their words were shot out of them like pellets, to the endangerment of their teeth.

"Serge!" began Pavlof, in the same difficult case. "We have much to tell you." He had to shout to get this out.

"So have I," jerked Serge, nodding and smiling happily still.

Paul shook his head. It was impossible. He clung to his seat with a grim face, not the face of a man rejoicing at his escape from prison, rather of one riding to trouble.

Serge glanced at him questioningly once or twice, but it was on Hope that his eyes turned most of the time, and he looked at her with the hungry gaze of a man who has been overlong deprived of his rightful food.

She found it hard to bear, and presently closed her eyes as though the bumping of the tarantas was painful to her.

They passed through Ust Kara at speed, and gained the posting road, and turned sharp to the

east in the direction of Ignashina. The going was easier now, both as to speed and roadway, but Palma's jubilant smile had faded by degrees for lack of response, and a look of perplexity had taken its place.

There was something here which he did not understand, but nothing was further from his thoughts than the actual fact.

He had looked for triumphant jubilation at the success of his exploit. Instead, he found sober faces and quiet acquiescence, and nothing more. But he put it all down to the effects of Kara, and it was not till they drew up at the first post-house for change of horses that Paul found his opportunity.

"I must speak with you, Palma," he said, as they dismounted.

"Nu! We will go along the road," said Serge, with a look of surprise, but just then the *teléga* came lumbering up and its occupants jumped out and came towards them.

"Tea for the *barina*," shouted Serge to the post-master, and turned to meet the others.

They were bright-faced young fellows, clad in green Cossack uniforms, with bandoliers and Berdan rifles. They saluted gravely, each with one eye closed in a solemn wink, as they approached.

"Don't give yourselves away, my children!" said Palma. "Drivers have eyes, and these return to Kara. Pavlof, this is Loris Blok, and this Alex Rimof. They are from Moscow. Good boys both, and longing for a fight before we get through. We are going to walk on. You two see that Madame is attended to. Now, my friend!" and he and Paul turned and walked along the road.

They walked in silence for a time. Never had Paul faced a more difficult situation, and he scarcely knew how to begin.

"Well!" said Serge at last. "What is it?"

"I am going to bruise your heart, Serge Petrovitch. But you must hear the whole truth, and you must not judge us harshly."

Palma looked sharply round at him. His face crumpled perplexedly and the jovial light had fled from it. He was beginning to fear, if not to understand.

"For two whole years we had no news of you, except news of your death—"

"Ah!"

"Mikhail Barenin brought the first report. That was fourteen months ago. Then one, Felix Ostrog, came, saying you were shot while trying to escape in his company near Tomsk. That was nearly twelve months ago."

"Go on!" said Palma grimly. He began to understand.

"Hope Ivanovna waited for news of you with a breaking heart—"

"I sent you word."

"It never reached us. Nothing but news of your death. I was Serge Palma. She was supposed to be my wife. Of her distress at finding me there instead of you, I need not tell you. She lived in my house with Madame Roskova, the wife of Dr. Feodor Roskof, who is at Yakutsk. I held myself aloof from her till she deemed me cold and hard. I did not tell her Barenin's news for three months after I had heard it, leaving her still the hope of your being alive. But the hope died, and she was in sore distress. When Ostrog came, saying he had seen you lying dead in the grass with a bullet through the head, we had no further hope of seeing you again. Before God, we believed you dead. My love for her was what it always had been. Before God, I would have died sooner than speak had I believed you still alive. You must believe me, Palma. She was in great distress and loneliness, and I loved her. She put me off for many months, still hoping against hope. And then—at last—we wedded—"

They had come to a stand long since and stood facing one another.

At the word, Palma's fist rose and dropped expressively, and his face tightened grimly. He turned and walked on without a word, and Pavlof followed.

They walked on and on. Would the carriages never come? Would Palma never speak? It seemed to Pavlof as if they might walk on so, in gloomy silence, for ever. But he had no words wherewith to break it. Of what avail words? He had struck this man over the heart, and he must have time to recover from the blow.

So, on and on, in a silence that was dreadful and seemed endless.

But all things come to an end, and at last they heard the carriages coming up the road behind them, and still Palma said no word of what was in him.

"Palma," said Paul, "do not break her heart. She has suffered enough. She is innocent of offence in this matter, as I am also. But, if you have anything to say, say it to me, here and now."

"There is nothing to say," said Serge with a groan. "It is the will of God. But it is hard to bear. She is all the world to me, Pavlof."

"God help us all!" said Paul, and the tarantas drove up.

They climbed silently to their places, and Hope's quick glance showed her that the story had been told. She had been very nervous as to the outcome. She was trembling now with anxiety as to what Serge would do, and how he would treat her.

He took her hand in his, and bent and kissed it, not with the quick passion of the former time, but reverently, as one kisses the hand of a dead love.

She burst into tears of relief and gratitude, and her fears were gone.

They were on the great Eastern road now, and speech was possible. And presently, when she had recovered her composure somewhat, he bent towards her and asked very gently—

"And—the child, Hope? What of it?"

"Ah! You have not heard, Serge?" The words came in a nervous torrent. "He died when he was three months old.—We did our best, Marya Ostronaya and I, but we could not keep him.—And truly, Serge, I was so broken with it all that I was glad when God took him. Did you not find Masha, then?"

"She died two months before I got there."

"Dear old Masha! She was very faithful. It broke her heart to be sent away, but I could not take

her with me. Who told you I had come here, then?"

"Nobody. I knew you, that was enough. That was my only fear in getting away—that we might pass one another on the road."

"Then you did not know for certain till you got here?"

"Not till I got here. As soon as I heard that Madame Palma had come out to join her husband I put two and two together. I knew it must be you."

"And now—do you think it possible we can get clear away, Serge?"

"We will try for it anyway," he said valiantly.

"How do we go?" asked Pavlof.

"Up into the mountains to mislead them. Then down again to the Amur and the Vladivostok road."

"Won't that be dangerous?"

"Not for us. I have fresh papers, giving you your freedom and ordering me to see you safely out of Russian territory."

"You are well provided. How did you manage it?"

"You remember Egor Anenkof? He is employed in the Ministry of the Interior and is a most useful man. He has worked for years to get into

his present position, with the sole object of being of service to his friends in trouble. Some day he will be found out and then he will come to the mines. However, there are others."

"Who are these two with you?" she asked.

"Loris Blok and Alex Rimof. They are from Moscow. I had to have orderlies. That was where Muishkin made his mistake. They are capital fellows and bold as lions. If it should come to a fight they will be delighted. In fact they will be somewhat disappointed if it does not, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I hope there is no chance of that," said Hope anxiously.

"We will hope not," said Palma, with a quick glance at Paul, which showed him that she had heard nothing of the telegram. "But if they should find out the trick and try to stop us we shall have—well, we shall have to argue the point."

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW THEY FOUGHT IN THE CLEFT

THE route Palma had chosen, when at last they turned off the posting road, was a little-used track leading up into the Yablonois, rough travelling amid broken black hills, whose feet were sparsely clad with ancient growths of larch and fir, and their crests powdered with snow. At times the way led through dark defiles, with brawling streams gnashing sudden white teeth at them as they passed, and then they were crawling slowly over rugged humps of the hills, amid ever-increasing desolation and a loneliness that grew more and more profound.

Not one traveller did they encounter after quitting the main road. Only once, in a distant hollow, they caught a glimpse of the beasts and tents of some nomadic tribe, with thin blue wreaths of smoke hanging over them. But these were the only signs of humanity; they conveyed no sense of friendliness

and served only to accentuate the surrounding loneliness.

Twice they had changed horses and drivers at lonely little posting stations, and had obtained welcome cups of hot tea and such coarse eatables as the places afforded. But the tea atoned for all shortcomings, and, apart from other matters, they were all in hopeful spirits at the success which had attended their risky adventure so far.

Palma indeed kept a cautious eye on the rear whenever they topped a point of vantage. And Blok and Rimof, bumping merrily along in the *teléga* some distance behind the *tarantas*, had their faces turned hopefully over their shoulders most of the time.

While the stout little horses scrambled painfully up the rocky ways, the travellers in the *tarantas* talked quietly at times of the past, and more briefly of the future. Serge told them shortly of his first escape and recapture, and of his final escape after another change of names at Tomsk. He congratulated himself and them on the forethought which had long since led his father to deposit a certain portion of his fortune in the hands of his old friend, Charles Gerrardius, the great Geneva banker; just as he himself had made provision for Hope by banking money in her name with Roths-

childs' in London. It was thanks to this that his way had been comparatively easy when once he got clear of Russian territory, and what a poor man could only have dreamt of doing, a rich man had been able to accomplish—thus far at all events.

As to the future, they spoke but little. It was in the balances and the scales might go against them. To count upon it—even to discuss it over-much—seemed to savour of presumption, and felt like a tempting of Providence.

"Is there nothing we can do for Russia?" asked Hope sadly.

"Nothing!" said Serge sombrely. "Until the ground is cleared of its present growth, nothing! And the clearing will have to come from the bottom, I fear, since the top cares for nothing but keeping top. The reckoning day will come sometime and it will be a terrible one."

"Poor Russia!" sighed Hope.

"Poor Russians!" said Serge, "who sit quietly under the yoke and suffer like oxen."

A shrill whistle from the rear stopped him. He sprang half out of his seat and leaned out, looking anxiously backwards.

Then he called to the driver to stop, and leaped down and went to meet the *teléga*.

"What is it?" he asked, as it drew near.

"Bandits, brigands, nomads," cried Blok and Rimof eagerly, with nods and winks behind the driver's back. "About a dozen, as far as we can see, mounted and coming up smartly."

"Ah! Then it looks as if you were not to be done out of your fun, boys."

He looked carefully round. They were in an upland valley. Ahead, the road wound away into the mountains through a narrow defile, a cleft with almost perpendicular sides of scarped rock.

"How far to the next station?" he asked the driver of the teléga, who sat listening impassively.

"About twenty versts, barin."

"That is the place for us, boy," said Palma, with a nod towards the cleft in the rocks.

"Couldn't be better," said Blok, with enthusiasm.

"We'll halt at this end," said Rimof. "You go on and see if it is better still farther in."

They could see the pursuers plainly now, as they bobbed over a distant ridge and disappeared into the hollow. Palma ran back to the tarantas, out of which Hope and Pavlof were peering anxiously. His nod to Pavlof told him what there was to tell.

"Go ahead!" to the driver, "and smartly."

"Come, my little ones," chirruped the driver, and the tarantas rolled on into the cleft.

"What is it?" asked Hope.

"Brigands, the boys say"—so much for the benefit of the driver, who, however, showed no interest in the matter. "They may be after us, they may not. Blok and Rimof are anxious to have a chat with them."

He was looking out ahead as he talked, and examining the lie of the land carefully. They shaved an angle of rock with a heavy lurch and turned sharp to the right. Palma leaped out.

"That will do!" to the driver. "Stop! Loose your horses and take them round that next loop and wait there."

"Yes, barin."

"You had better go too, Hope."

She hesitated a moment, as if with the intention of objecting. Then she turned and went after the horses.

"The boys are waiting at the entrance," said Palma. "This is better. We will go for them," and he and Pavlof ran back along the road.

Five minutes later the *teléga* stood alongside the *tarantas* just inside the sharp turn of the road. The driver stolidly did as he was told and followed his companion round the next loop with his horses. Another five minutes' pulling and hauling and the

teléga was in position across the road, jammed tight against the left wall of the cleft and blocking it completely except a two-foot space between its front and the opposite wall. And the tarantas stood across the road inside it, jammed tight against the right wall and leaving only a similar space between its front and the left-hand wall.

The barricade was perfect, thanks to the formation of the cleft. To horsemen it was impossible, and to storm it on foot the attack must come under, among the wheels, or over the top, or must wind in single file through the narrow openings between the vehicles.

Palma laughed grimly when it was completed.

"If they work through that they'll deserve all they get," he said, and the four men stood expectantly behind their barricade, and waited events.

"Take this," said Palma, holding out a revolver to Pavlof. "We can't have the game spoiled by a handful of Cossocks.

Blok and Rimof, in their capacity of orderlies, carried Berdan rifles with a bandolier of cartridges over the shoulder.

Presently the sound of hoofs echoed in the angle of the rocks above them. Then the regular foot-falls turned into a confused trampling and scrab-

bling, as the horsemen halted in a bunch at sudden sight of the obstruction and backed away from it.

Palma stepped quietly between the two vehicles and confronted them.

"Well, what's the matter now?" he asked.

"You are Lieutenant Vinsky?" asked one, shaking his horse a step or two out of the throng. Pavlof, looking over the barricade, saw that it was Lieutenant Tschaik, Sokolof's right-hand man, *vice* Razin retired through the hunger-strike, but of exactly the same breed and as like him as twin peas. The rest were low-browed, heavy-faced fellows of the ordinary Cossack type. All their little black eyes were fixed sullenly on Palma, as though casting up to him the account of their long, hard ride.

Palma nodded curtly, and asked again, "What is it you want?"

"You and your party are to return," said Tschak brusquely.

"Ah! and why?"

"Captain Sokolof's orders."

"I am not under Captain Sokolof's orders and I shall not return."

"Then we are to bring you."

"Be advised, my friend, and don't attempt it."

"We have our orders," said Tschak.

"And I have mine."

Tschak shook his bridle again and his pony made a step forward.

Palma held up a warning hand.

"We shall both regret it if worse comes of this. I warn you if you try to pass that barrier we shall stop you," and he stepped back behind the carriages and drew his companions round the angle of the rock.

They could not see the enemy, nor the enemy them, till one or other advanced. The barricade, however, the crux of the matter, was visible to both parties.

"We could get well ahead while they are thinking about it," said Pavlof, from no feeling of cowardice, but from a simple vast distaste for the killing of men, deepened in this case by the knowledge that they were only doing their duty and had no personal animus in the matter.

"It would only be a postponement of the evil," said Palma, "and a throwing away of our chances. We are impregnable here.—I'm sorry, but the lives of ten Cossacks weigh nothing against what I am here for."

It was late in the afternoon and the shadows were already abroad in that gloomy cleft. Palma passed round his cigarettes, and they leaned against the boulders smoking quietly and listening intently.

Blok and Rimof were restless to be doing. To quiet them their leader gave them permission to steal into the tarantas and learn what the opposing force was up to.

Blok was back in a moment, with a smile all over his face.

"They're doing the same as we are—sitting smoking and thinking about it," he said.

"A rest before the assault," said Palma quietly, "and the last smoke for some of them if they try that corner. Keep a sharp eye on them, Loris. It will be dark in ten minutes, then they'll make a move. The moment they do so, come back here both of you," and young Blok slipped away to join his friend.

The shadows deepened in the well of the cleft till the barricade was only a darker shadow among them.

Blok's voice whispered suddenly alongside Palma and Pavlof. "They are withdrawing down the valley."

"Out of earshot for instructions. They'll come back presently. Well, they've had their warning. Fetch Alex, Loris. They will come with a rush, poor devils! And their shooting will be wild and free, and we can't afford any useless risks," and Blok stole away again into the deeper shadow.

Such waiting tries the temper of a man's courage as no actual fighting can, and if his mettle lacks steel it saps and runs, and leaves him limp for the fray. But to Hope, sitting solitary on a rock behind the next turn of the road, this anxious waiting was more terrible still.

She wove her fingers tight, and bowed her head, and prayed numbly. Her life, and the lives of the men down the road, were at stake. Liberty at such a price was dearly purchased.

Suppose Paul should be killed, what would life be worth to her? Suppose they were all killed, what would become of her?—left alone in the wilderness with these rough boors, who sat smoking impassively and thought more—if they thought at all—of the safety of their horses than of the lives in the balance down yonder.

She jumped up, and went to the bend of the road, and peered down into the darkness. But there was not a sound, and her anxiety deepened every instant.

She took a step or two round the corner, stopped, and stood listening. It was no good going. Her presence would only hamper them, and their hands were overfull as it was.

Then a sudden vicious spurt of flame ripped out of the ground in the nearer darkness in front. In a

moment the angle of the cleft blazed with intermittent flashes and echoed with shots and shouts. Something sang past her in the darkness, and she ran back and dropped on her rock, and held her hands over her ears. And alongside her the drivers grunted guttural ejaculations over their pipes, and the horses stamped restlessly at the turmoil.

Loris Blok had withdrawn along the road with the rest after recalling Rimof. But he was one of those restless souls who find it impossible to wait doing nothing, and he was aching for a fight. He had in his time suffered at the hands of the authorities, both as student and prisoner. He had seen his comrades beaten down and ridden over in the streets of Moscow. He had seen them shot down in the open and done to death in the prisons, and he hated the doers of these things, head and hand, from the highest to the lowest, with a very bitter hatred.

The only fear he had was lest the enemy should withdraw—even now, at this ultimate moment, when everything was shaping so well for a settlement of old scores, and forces were, as he considered it, so evenly balanced.

The pursuers were, indeed, nearly three to one, but the position was against them. It would be a tremendous pity if such an opportunity were

allowed to slip. Sooner than let that happen he would venture much.

Inch by inch, in the dark, he edged noiselessly away from the others towards the barricade. He knelt down and crept between the hind wheels of the *teléga* and the rock wall. He craned his head round the corner, and became instantly aware of a similar approach from the other side.

He waited in joyful suspense. He held his breath. His rifle barrel slipped cautiously through his left hand, till his right hand was on the lock.

There was a shuffling of many feet outside, a click of the tongue such as one uses to start a horse, and Blok opened fire.

A guttural curse and a stumble, the crash of many rifles, the splintering of wood, the spat of bullets on rock, and the bend of the cleft blazed fitfully in the intermittent flashes.

But Blok lay still and fired no more. He had disobeyed orders and he had paid the price.

Half-a-dozen dark figures slipped in round the end of the *teléga*, and some came out round the end of the *tarantas*, and some from underneath it, and some stood and fired over it. Other hands seized the *teléga* and slewed it round into the roadway to widen the approach.

But, as the dark figures emerged from the darkness of the tarantas, the three defenders opened fire, with revolvers and rifle, and man after man went down.

The cleft boiled like a mighty pot in the light of the continuous flashes. It was full of wreathing smoke and vicious cracklings and wild-flying lead.

That first shot from beneath the *teléga* had told Palma Blok's story. He curtly bade the others grimp to the rock, but himself stood out in the narrow way and shot down man after man as they issued round, or crept from under, the tarantas. One might almost have thought him careless of his life. When his revolver was empty, and still they came, he ran in and used the butt on any head or face that offered.

Rimof's Berdan rang out alongside Pavlof as fast as he could snap in the cartridges. But the besiegers' bullets were two to one in spite of casualties, and presently Pavlof heard the clang of a rifle as it fell on the rocky way at his feet, and then the sprawling fall of a man.

He was bending to him, when, in the fitful glare in front, he saw Palma fall in a heap also, and he ran forward to help him. The men behind the tarantas gave a hoarse shout, and the cleft blazed

and boiled again. Pavlof felt a bullet rip through his coat. Another stung through his shoulder like the searing of a hot iron, and spun him round and dropped him on Palma's body.

Then what were left of the besiegers came panting round the barricade, and stumbled on the two bodies, and kicked them and cursed them. Pavlof sat up. Palma lay still.

By Lieutenant Tschak's orders one of his men kicked some planks out of the side of the *teléga*, and started a fire for the purpose of ascertaining casualties. He swore roundly as the bodies were dragged up one by one and laid in a line. Six of his men lay there dead or wounded. Blok was dead. Rimof was dead. By the crackling flames Pavlof endeavoured to find out if Palma was dead. There was a hole in his breast from which the blood was welling, but he groaned as Pavlof attempted to staunch it with his handkerchief.

"Dead?" growled Lieutenant Tschak, looking down at them.

"Wounded here," said Pavlof, pointing to the hole, "but he lives still," and went on with his bandaging.

"The worse for him," said Lieutenant Tschak.

Then Hope stole silently into the circle of light, her white face pinched and drawn with her fears.

She saw Pavlof, she saw whose body he was bending over, and she ran to them with a cry.

"Is he dead?" she asked breathlessly.

"Not dead, Hope, but sorely wounded, I fear."

She had held herself with a tight hand till now, but at sight of those stark bodies, and of this one, she broke down and sobbed convulsively.

Serge opened his eyes and looked up at her in a dazed way. Then his glance wandered to Pavlof and rested meditatively on him for a moment. Then it passed on to the coppery glow of the fire-light on the rocky walls, and his brow puckered as though he were trying hard to recollect all that had passed.

Pavlof saw his lips move and bent over him.

"Failed," he murmured faintly.

"No man could have done more, Serge. We are very grateful."

"More harm than good. Sorry!"

"Does it pain you?"

"Yes—I'm done—What will you do?"

"We are in God's hands," said Hope gently, and sank down beside him and drew his head on to her lap.

The shadow of a smile trembled on his lips, and there was a flickering spark in his eyes as he looked up at her.

"God keep you, dear," he said, very softly, and turned his eyes on Pavlof again, and said, "And you."

A great pity for him filled Hope's heart. She bent down and kissed his forehead and he lay still. And presently, as they watched him, he sighed gently, and stretched himself out like a weary man.

Hope bent over him weeping. She thought he was dead. Pavlof stood up.

"He will die if you move him," he said to Lieutenant Tschak.

"So! He will have to be moved all the same," said Tschak. "Where are your horses?"

"Up the road," and having done all he could for Palma, he turned to the others and examined their wounds, and showed their comrades how to bind them up till better could be done for them.

And presently, the stolid-faced drivers came slowly down with the horses, and led them stolidly past the row of dead bodies, and harnessed them to their respective vehicles.

The only exclamation that fell from them was from the driver of the télégé at the sight of the broken side.

"Da! Some one will have to pay for that. My word, yes!"

An hour later they were on their way back to Kara. Hope and the wounded men in the tarantas, Palma's head in her lap, and her heart bruising for his sake with every bump of the heavy wheels. The dead were piled promiscuously into the teléga, and Pavlof rode one of the dead men's horses.

Lieutenant Tschak was the only reasonably cheerful member of the party. He had been instructed to bring back the fugitives alive or dead, and he was bringing them back, not one missing.

The bitterness and shock of the catastrophe were still too close and sudden not to weigh heavily on the spirits of Hope and Pavlof. For the present they could only mourn their loss, without a thought for the distressing complication which Serge's death would remove from their path. He had made a gallant attempt at their rescue, he had given his life for them, and their hearts were very sore for him.

The Cossacks, whole and wounded alike, bore themselves stolidly. If, now and again, at the bumping of the tarantas over the rocky way, one or another growled a curse, and feathered it at Hope with a white side-glance, it missed its mark, for she took no notice. She was thinking of Serge and of Pavlof, and wondering dully what the end of it all would be.

At the best, she supposed, it would mean Kara for life for Paul. She did not see how he could possibly have acted otherwise than he had done. But he had broken bounds and he must suffer the consequences. Well, they had been very happy at Kara. They would still be together. Her heart chilled at thought of what might have been, and glowed again at thought of what was.

Suppose it had been Pavlof's head which lay like a clod on her knee, ah, how desolate her state then! So, even in the depths of her distress, she found a ray of consolation and cause for thankfulness, and these helped her to bear herself with a certain rigid composure.

It was long after midnight when they hammered on the door of the post-house from which they had started out that afternoon, and the startled postmaster came near to losing his wits when he saw the gruesome company that summoned him.

The wounded men were carried in, one by one, and laid on the floor. Serge would never have got into the house alive but for Hope's tender care and Pavlof's insistent endorsement of it. They were brutalised by usage and careless to bodily suffering, those Cossacks of the mines. But some of them had been under Pavlof's hands in the hospital and

his word still had weight with them. As it was, and in spite of all their care, the handling started Palma's wound bleeding again. He was barely alive, but he opened his heavy eyes and groaned as they carried him in, and seemed to wonder that they could not leave him to die in peace.

Pavlof, with his one arm, could do little more for him or the others than had already been done on the field. His own shoulder was stiff and painful, but the bullet had gone clean through without smashing the bone, and it was only a question of care and nursing.

In the corner of the room allotted to them, they staunched Palma's wound again and bound him up as well as they were able, and Hope bathed Pavlof's shoulder and renewed his own hasty bandages; and then, under his instructions, did what little could be done for the others. They suffered her ministrations in silence and gave her no thanks, but still the occupation was a relief to her. Even minutes saved from the contemplation of one's own troubles are minutes gained.

In time, some black bread and tea, with "cutlets" of chopped meat, were brought to them, and after their long fast, and all they had gone through, they felt the need of them. Paul succeeded in getting a few drops of vodka down Palma's throat, and the

onlookers considered it good liquor wasted and did not scruple to say so.

Then the soldiers lighted their pipes and the atmosphere became thick and pungent. Their stolidity relaxed somewhat, and they roughly fought the battle over again, and illuminated it with oaths and jokes and jibes. And to Hope—with the dead men lying outside in a ghastly heap in the teléga, and Serge lying like death alongside her on the floor, and Paul dozing fitfully against the wall—it was all a nightmare of horrors, and she never forgot it.

She was weary beyond words, but she could not sleep. Now and again her tired eyes closed in repulsion against the acrid smoke and the slimy things that crept about the walls; but there was no escape from the sounds and the smells, and, bodily, as well as mentally, she felt sick to death.

That night of purgatory seemed as though it would never end. It was but a few hours in reality, but to her it was a long-drawn, sickening agony, which stretched back further than she could bear to think of, and forward beyond all hope of amelioration.

But day broke at last. The light stole dimly through the thick-paned window, and the distorted shadows resolved themselves into the forms of men

lying huddled in uncouth attitudes. Paul woke up with a start, and, with a glance at her which pinched his lips for her suffering, he bent over Palma to see if he were still alive.

He was breathing, but no more, and it seemed doubtful to Paul if he would be got into the tarantas alive.

But Lieutenant Tschak had no compunctions about making the attempt. Under his autocratic ordering, every man who could swallow got a bowl of hot tea and a hunch of bread. Then the sick were carried out, with small attention to their groanings, and the funereal procession set off at a foot pace for the journey home. Two of the wounded Cossacks got there before they reached Kara; and when they rumbled slowly through Ust Kara, through which they had rattled so briskly the day before, Hope's companions in the tarantas were two dead men, and two sorely wounded, and Serge Palma—and him she feared dead, since he showed no signs of life.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW THREE CAME HOME AND ONE WENT FURTHER

AS they jolted through the Lower Diggings and the settlement, all who could turned out to see them pass, and so they came at last to the political prison, where Captain Sokolof and a grizzly-bearded stranger stood awaiting them inside the great stockade.

Sokolof listened with a grim face to Lieutenant Tschak's report, while the wounded men were being carried into the hospital and the teléga discharged its ghastly load.

Pavlof had got down stiffly from his horse, and Hope climbed down from the tarantas as soon as Serge's body had been lifted down, and, when he had disposed of the rest, Sokolof came across to them. Hope's eyes swept his face anxiously for indications of their fate, but found it inscrutable. The grizzly-bearded man had followed the wounded men into the hospital.

"Madame, you are at liberty to return to your own house," said Sokolof abruptly. "You, Mr. Palma, must remain here."

"May I not stop with my husband, sir?" asked Hope. "He is wounded."

"It shall be seen to. You will be better at home, Madame."

"You will be far better there, dearest. God keep you!" said Paul, and kissed her very tenderly, thinking it might well be for the last time.

With the same fear in her, she took one long look at him, and then went brokenly down the enclosure. The great gate opened and closed, the pointed black fangs of the stockade grinned derisively, and Paul wondered if he would ever see her more.

He was still staring blankly at the gates, as though he could see through them and after her, when Sokolof touched him on the shoulder, and said quietly, "Follow me!" and strode away to his own quarters.

"You made a great mistake," he said, turning upon him abruptly, as soon as they were in his room. "What made you go with that man?"

"It was impossible for me to do otherwise."

"Da! Impossible? What hold has he on you?"

Pavlof hesitated. He did not know where he stood, and least said soonest mended.

"Who is he?" asked Sokolof again. "And why had you to go with him?"

And still Pavlof made no reply.

"See, Mr. Palma, I have been your friend. I would still be so. But, as I see things at present, it is an ill return you have made me in this matter."

Pavlof made a gesture of dissent.

"Yes," said Sokolof, "an ill return, and calculated to damage me sorely at headquarters. An escape is nothing. But to be gulled in this fashion, and to call their attention to it myself by that cursed telegram, which was intended entirely for your benefit—"

"He tried hard to dissuade you from it."

"For his own ends. The result has been disastrous, and the matter, and your share in it, must be investigated. But, in the fact of your going, you are not incriminated. His papers were all in order, so far as we could possibly make out. In going with him you only obeyed orders supposed to have come from St. Petersburg. But that is not enough for me. There is that behind which I do not understand. If I am still to stand your friend I must understand it."

Upon which Pavlof took his fate in his hands.

"It is a strange story," he said, "and may try your credence at times. But I will tell you the

whole matter, and you shall judge me. The man who is dying in the hospital there is Serge Palma—"

"Serge Palma!" echoed Sokolof in vast surprise. "Then who—? Who the devil are you?"

"I am Paul Pavlof."

At which Sokolof shook his head with a perplexed pinching of the brows. He had never heard of Paul Pavlof.

"But Madame—" he asked, with sudden inspiration, "Is she then not Madame Palma?"

"She was Palma's wife. She came out here to join him. He and I had exchanged names on the road. He stopped at Minusinsk. I came on to Kara. Instead of her husband, she found me here."

"You had known her before she married Palma?"

"Yes, I had known her and loved her. But I was very poor, and she was very enthusiastic on the subject of the people."

"And Palma was rich?"

"Palma was rich."

"I begin to see. And now—is she your wife or Palma's?"

"She is my wife—now. We awaited news of Palma. We got only news of his death—"

"Ah?"—as if he would have liked much to inquire how such news had reached him.

"And so, after long waiting, we married. Then Palma came, at the risk of his life, to pay the debt he considered he owed me. I was quite happy here. So was my wife. His coming was terrible to us. What could we do?"

Sokolof nodded.

"We could not refuse to go, though we had no wish to go. If we had refused, you would have sent us. The only thing we could have done was impossible, and that was to expose the man who was risking his life for us. Would you have done that, Captain Sokolof?"

"I would not."

"And what would you have thought of me if I had done it?"

"I should have thought you a cur."

"Exactly. Now you understand the whole matter."

"Now I understand." He paced thoughtfully to and fro. Once he stopped and faced Pavlof, as if about to speak, but thought better of it and went on.

"I must keep you here for the present," he said at last, "till inquisition is made into the matter."

"You will let me see to Palma and the others?"

"They will be seen to. The man you saw with me arrived last night. He is the new doctor appointed by headquarters."

"Ah, then I would be glad to have him strap up my shoulder."

"You are wounded? Yes, I remember, Madame mentioned it."

"A bullet went through me in the *melée*, but I don't think any great damage is done. It was a narrow defile—"

"Don't tell me anything about it," Sokolof held up his hand. "Tschak and the rest will no doubt have quite enough to say about it. A good deal will depend on what they say. I will send Irbatsky in to look at your shoulder. And, remember, the less said the better."

"Will you as a favour allow me to nurse Palma to the end? It cannot be far off. You can understand—I feel as if I had used him ill, though God knows, I never intended to do so."

"I will see what Irbatsky says. I am a bit suspicious of him and must walk warily. Perhaps he will be glad of your help with the wounded. He is a drinker, unless I'm mistaken, which is perhaps the reason for his coming here. I will see you later."

And presently Dr. Irbatsky came in, and Pavlof bared his wound, and the doctor washed and strapped it, talking meanwhile of the fight.

"Ach, so you were fighting, too, Mr. Palma? Bad job, bad job! And no good came of it after all."

"I saw my friend fall, and went to help him," said Paul. "It was then that I got hit. How do you find him, Doctor?"

"Bad, very bad. It is a wonder he got back here alive."

"He can't last long?"

"Not many hours. Might die any minute."

"I would be grateful for your permission to sit by him till he goes. Can I help with the others also? I am ready to be of use."

"Da! I see no objection, if Captain Sokolof does not. But you are pretty well done up yourself and have lost blood. You can hardly keep your eyes open."

"I shall keep them open longer than he will."

"That's so. Well, come along. Captain Sokolof is with the prisoner now, but I doubt if he'll get anything out of him."

They crossed the enclosure and entered the hospital, and found Sokolof standing beside the bed on which Palma had been laid.

"Will he come to before he goes, Doctor?" asked Sokolof.

"He may, at the last. Or he may just drift out like that. He has no right to be here alive after what he's gone through."

"You can wait by him, Mr. Palma," said the captain. "I will leave you an orderly. If he shows signs of consciousness send for me instantly. It is of importance."

Pavlof bowed and sat down by the bed, and Sokolof and the doctor went out.

Serge breathed so slightly and softly that Paul doubted at times if he breathed at all, and more than once he had to bend close over him to make sure. He sat for a couple of hours in the dim light of the tiny lamp, and found it hard to keep his eyes open, as the doctor had said.

Then, suddenly, Palma made a slight uneasy movement, and Paul bade the orderly fetch Captain Sokolof.

The captain was there almost immediately.

"Has he come to?" he asked quickly, as he dismissed the orderly.

"He has moved for the first time since I came, and it indicates a change. He has not spoken,"—and they sat and waited.

Presently a slow sigh from the bed, and they bent

over it. Palma opened his eyes wearily and looked up at them.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Sokolof.

A faint smile flickered over Palma's lips.

"I want you to tell me who you are."

Serge's eyes turned inquiringly on Paul, who bent down and took his cold hand in his.

"Paul Pavlof," whispered Serge.

"And who is this?" asked Sokolof, indicating Paul.

He looked steadily into Sokolof's eyes and answered, "Serge Palma."

"I have thought it wise to trust Captain Sokolof with the whole truth, Serge," said Paul, slowly and distinctly.

A faint surprise showed in the tired eyes.

"Now tell me," said Sokolof again, "Who is this?" indicating Paul.

"Paul Pavlof."

"And you are—?"

"Serge Palma."

"And that is the truth as you are about to appear before God?"

"The truth."

"Now I want to know who furnished you with the documents you brought here."

At that, the shadowy smile flickered over the

dying man's lips once more, but he made no answer.

"You will not tell me?"

"Never," came the feeble whisper.

They saw the lips move again presently, and both bent close.

"Hope?" he murmured.

"She is at home, Serge," said Paul. "It has tried her hard, all this."

"Sorry."

"We shall never forget it, or you. You did nobly."

He looked at Sokolof, who bent down to him.

"I pay—not them."

Sokolof straightened up and pondered for a moment. Then he bent down again, and spoke slowly and clearly as Pavlof had done. "Listen, Palma. I received from Petersburg last night papers authorizing me to set Serge Palma at liberty, on account of his services here, and on condition of his leaving the country at once and never setting foot on Russian territory again."

A great light glowed in the dulling eyes for a moment.

"That is Serge Palma," he said, in so loud a voice that it startled them—and died with the beautiful lie on his lips.

Paul knelt down by the bed, still holding the hand which grew colder and colder in his. He forgot Sokolof and all else for the moment. This man had given his life for him and for the woman they both loved, and his heart was sore stricken at his going, and by so sorrowful a path.

It was Sokolof who broke the silence at last.

"The pity," he said gravely, "that such men should be wasted."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW SOKOLOF PAID HIS DEBT

"IT is true what I told your friend," said Sokolof, when they had returned to his quarters. "I had not intended to tell you until I had finished my other inquiries, but I could not resist the temptation.—A brave man.—It is a grievous thing that we must have such against us.—But you understand, Mr. Palma—to me you remain Palma. I know nothing of the rest. And you understand also that if my inquiries implicate you in the fighting—"

Paul opened his mouth to speak, having no desire to skulk behind any screen of silence.

But Sokolof held up a peremptory hand once more. "Tell me nothing. Anything you say might harm you. It could not possibly help. We will say nothing to Madame at present, in case it goes against you. For her sake I hope it will not."

"And when—"

"I shall have all the statements completed by tomorrow. I can say nothing more now."

"Was it Dr. Irbatsky's coming—no, I remember, you said he only arrived last night—"

"I got a telegram from St. Petersburg the day you left, saying that no orders had been sent to remove you to Yakutsk, and that a new doctor was on the way with special instructions concerning you."

"I see. If Dr. Irbatsky had only arrived one day earlier—"

"As doubtless he ought to have done. But your friend would have found himself in the lions' den. It would be interesting to know what he would have done."

"He would have faced the matter boldly."

"That without doubt. But he would have found himself in a very tight place."

"I think he would have got out of it."

"I'm inclined to think he would. He would probably have offered to convoy you to the coast and see you safely off Russian territory."

It was late in the afternoon of the following day before Sokolof acquainted Pavlof with the result of his inquiries.

"I have discovered nothing to incriminate you, beyond the fact that you were present during the

fighting," he said. "You received that wound, I understand, in going to your friend's assistance when he was down. I am justified, therefore, in concluding that you took no part in the fight. I must insist on your not speaking"—as Pavlof opened his mouth. "I have asked each man specifically if he saw you in active resistance. They all agree that it was too dark to distinguish persons, and that they never saw you till you ran in to your friend. And so, Mr. Palma, I shall act on the instructions brought by Dr. Irbatsky and hand you your papers. I have here also certain documents from Palma's portmanteau. You had better take them. They seem of importance—to Madame, at all events. Now you are at liberty to go to her and acquaint her with this matter, and—you can leave Kara when you will."

Pavlof wrung the generous hand in silence. He could not trust himself to speak. Captain Sokolof had repaid him with interest. He took the papers and went out a free man.

He went quickly to his cottage, in such a tumult of emotions, that Dr. Irbatsky, seeing him pass, took unction to his soul under the mistaken impression that he and Sokolof must have been drinking together, and argued well for his own prospective enjoyments of a similar nature.

There was a light in the cottage, and Pavlof trod softly as he drew near, and peered through the window.

Anna Roskova, and Marya Verskaïa, and Hope, were sitting at the table with the samovar before them. He wondered, in the vague way in which one's mind, when tightly strung, wanders off at times on inconsequent trifles, which of them had slept on the hearth the previous night. He thought it would be Marya. He was sure it was not Hope.

But none of the three looked as if they had slept for a week, and there was little speech between them. They had had time to say all that could be said, and now only a dull and hopeless expectation was left to them.

He turned the handle and walked in, and the three speechless women were changed, after one moment of breathless wonder, into incarnate questions. They all talked at once, and literally fell on his neck in their excitement, till Marya, unable to express her feelings in any other way, began to scream and beat her knees with her hands, and the floor with her feet.

He got them quieted at last by declining to say a word till they gave him a cup of tea, and Hope's hand shook so as she poured it out that there was as much tea on the table as in the cup. Then—

"They have set me free, Hope," he said, "and we can go when we choose."

"Oh, Paul!"—at which Anna and Marya opened their eyes very wide, and wondered if excess of joy had really turned his brain. She clasped her hands gratefully and gazed at him in wonder. "And I was fearing I might never see you again. God is very good to us!"

"We have to leave Russia for good."

"I shall be glad to. It is hopeless. And Serge?"

"He died last night."

At which she only bowed her head silently, for she had known that he could not possibly live.

"Did he know?" she asked at last.

"Yes, Sokolof told him."

"I am going to tell Polokof, and Hugo Svendt, and all the rest the good news," said Anna Roskova, jumping up.

"And I will go with you," said Marya, coming to her senses.

And they went off full of excitement and wonder, but, though they often thereafter spoke together of the strange fact that Hope Palma called her husband Paul, and that Serge was dead, they never discussed it except between themselves, and they never got to the bottom of it.

"Shall we go, Hope, or shall we stop and help them through the summer?" he said thoughtfully.

"You have done enough, Paul," she said, startled at his suggestion, for these last days had told on her. "Oh, let us go!"

"It is bound to break out again, you see, though it won't be as bad as it was before."

"You have done enough," she said again. "Your life has been at stake these two years, and I—I long for the air of freedom."

"The man you saw in the prison yard was the new doctor, Irbatsky. I don't much like the looks of him. I doubt if he has got much constitution left. If he goes under they'll be as badly off as ever, and I feel that I owe Sokolof much."

"You paid the debt in advance. You must think of yourself now—and of me—and—" And she leaned over to him, with the flush of a heavenly hope in her face, and whispered in his ear.

There were stars in his eyes as he looked into hers and kissed her glowing face.

"That settles it, dearest. We will go at once—as soon as we have buried our friends."

Then Dmitri Polokof, and Hugo Svendt, and Alexei Etelsky, and a host of others came flocking in, to welcome Serge Petrovitch back and to bid them both Godspeed.

Long after midnight the little house was still humming and swarming like a beehive, till the wonder was that the walls could hold so great an effervescence. There were messages to friends to be delivered, if ever the chance offered, and if not, then to be conveyed by letter from the land of freedom to the land that was not free. And so many were they that Paul had to take them down on the margin of a small Bible, in a species of shorthand which he had used as a student, and which he had no fear of any one being able to read, since at times he could hardly make it out himself. Actual letters he regretfully but firmly declined to carry. But he took enough notes to fill many pages and comfort many anxious hearts at home.

When at last they had their house to themselves—for Anna Roskova and Marya Verskaïa flatly refused to intrude upon them, and billeted themselves for the night among their friends—Paul came on the papers Sokolof had handed to him. He had stuffed them into his pocket and thought no more about them.

"These are yours, Hope," he said. "They are Serge's papers. Sokolof sent them to you."

They looked through them with tender respect and with no thought of gain. But among them they found a letter from Serge setting forth the

sums he had left in the hands of Gerrardius, the Geneva banker, and with Rothschilds, in London, and it stated that instructions had also been left with both to pay over the amounts to Hope, in case of his death.

It was a considerable amount, nearly 200,000 roubles.

But Pavlof said decisively, "That is for the cause—in some way or other. We will not touch it except for our immediate necessities, and that we will replace as soon as possible."

"Yes," said Hope, in a glow of happiness at the thought. "We will send some of it here. They are so miserably poor, most of them."

"I will arrange it with Captain Sokolof. He is a man of his word. I am beginning to like him."

They buried Palma, and Rimof, and Blok, in the little cemetery of the Free Command on the hillside, and laid them close against the Eastern boundary, as near to freedom as was possible. The white wooden post which marks their resting place bears only the initials P. R. B. But to Paul and Hope Pavlof, who alone know all that lies beneath that simple monument, the memory of those three brave men is a fragrant and ever cherished possession.

And when they speak together of the great heart

that lies at rest there, their own hearts are very full—of the loyal-souled one who went so boldly to his death for them—and of that Guiding Hand which inspired and accepted the sacrifice, and turned it to their lasting good.

The same day Pavlof made arrangements for their journey to Vladivostok, and then went up for a last talk with Captain Sokolof.

He told him their decision as to Palma's money, and Sokolof did his best to veil his impression that the joy of freedom had made them slightly mad.

"Da! 200,000 roubles!" he said. "That is a fortune not easily arrived at. And you will throw it away."

"By no means, if you will help us to make good use of it."

"I will help you, but it is throwing it away all the same."

"We don't think so. I will send, to you direct, from time to time, money to help our friends here who are in need. Dmitri Polokof and Madame Roskova will give you their names."

"I will see to it. Are you taking any letters?" he asked, and fixed him with a keen eye.

"Not one. I knew you would ask."

"Messages?"

"That you can hardly stop me doing," said Pav-

lof, with a smile, "but none that will do you any harm."

And next morning they shook him warmly by the hand, and even felt some regret at parting from him. For, if he was a hard man, he was just, according to his lights and the cast-iron nature of his environment, and to them he had proved a good friend and one who did not forget.

Colonel Zazarin was still too ill to care a kopeck what became of them or of the whole settlement. His thoughts were wandering in such strange and shadowy places that Anna Roskova sat in his room with her fingers stuffed into her ears, and her heart full of loathing and pity at these self-revelations of a tortured soul.

Captain Sokolof provided Paul with the necessary papers for securing their immunity on the road, and furnished him with the usual orders for post-horses at the various stations.

And so, with hearts at ease, such as they had been very far from feeling on the last occasion, they once more turned their faces towards freedom. And if those who crowded to the cottage doors, to wave them hearty farewells as they passed, envied them their great good fortune, not one but acknowledged that none deserved it better, and not one begrudged them the smallest piece of it.

THE END

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